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# Finding Our Place In The Garden — A Holistic Approach To Art Education

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**in**

**The Department**

**of**

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## ABSTRACT

**Finding Our Place In The Garden--A Holistic Approach To Art Education**

**Angela Galindo**

This study, Finding Our Place In The Garden--A Holistic Approach To Art Education, is a qualitative research based on the art practices of an alternative community-based rehabilitation program for children with disabilities. The program takes place in an outdoor natural environment in which children with and children without especial needs are offered a variety of workshops directed by an interdisciplinary group of professionals. This group includes artists, art therapists, social workers and educators. The author participated in two summer sessions as a volunteer participant- observer. During this time she recorded her experiences and observations in a diary and a series of slides.

An analysis of the Spiral Garden program focuses on:

- the reciprocal role of the environment on art/art-making and community-building practices, and of the latter on the environment.
- the emergent function of community art and specifically of the performing arts as agents of both social and cultural cohesion and integration of all the other art languages and crafts.

An analysis of the function of art in the social and natural environment of Spiral Garden reveals that its role is subordinate to yet integrated with the primary goal of empowering the child through art-making practices. Education takes place in this setting

in a social context more than a strictly educational one. Consequently, art does not have an autonomous formal identity but an organic social function of fostering self-directed creative exploration and social inclusiveness.

From the perspective of a researcher working out of the art education official context, the author reflects also on the role that the alternative community-based art programs play within a contemporary art education field.

To the child within us

who crosses the borders and frontiers

of definitive instants

To the child within the adult

who sails towards the infinite shores

of enlightened darkness

To Spiral Garden

the portion of earth and air

that gave me the chance of being lost

and found in its centre

my centre

to

Jan

Paul

Leah

Andrea

Marilyn

Clare

Pablo

Anne

Oliva

Bru

ce

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# ( I ) INTRODUCTION

## My Story

During my adolescence, contemporary dance opened up to me a new approach for my drawing and painting. Through dancing, I discovered a new spatial and corporeal awareness which enriched my plastic expression. This novelty, a blend of both spontaneity and dexterity, was linked to an increased sense of personal power, freedom and enjoyment with regard to the specific activity of transforming physical, emotional, and intellectual experience into visual language. A dialogue between dancing and drawing/painting was taking place and the commonality between them was a line of action connecting my invisible, undefined interior world with a body of visible, defined exterior signs.

In addition, my initiation into body/mind practices such as yoga in my early twenties, allowed me to integrate biological, emotional, psychological, and intellectual processes within the pace and rhythm of my own breathing. This experiential knowledge expanded my identity or consciousness from the mere area of "thinking" to the much broader field of "being".

In which way did this body/mind experiential knowledge influence and modify my art processes? Body/mind experiences helped me to internalize that both "to be active" and "to be receptive" were complementary and not antagonistic aspects of the creative process. Certainly, to offer myself to the ongoing creative processes of incubation, gestation, recognition and interpretation of the theme-impulse was as important as to express the creative act itself. In addition, I began to realize that the qualitative aspects of life's experiences were the foundation of any aesthetic interpretation or construction. An

increasing awareness of being an alert and silent witness of myself-within-life through the artistic process was taking place.

During a four year period previous to my studies at the Fine Arts School of Valencia University (Spain), I combined both the study of wood carving, and the making and selling of wood and clay crafts with my active participation in an interdisciplinary Granada-based group of artists. That was my first important encounter with musicians, writers, actors, clowns, and a varied "fauna" of alternative groups in the city. Our concern was not only about aesthetic positions but about everything --politics, philosophy, astrology, how/what to eat and, overall, how to live.

Later on, I completed my studies in fine arts (1983-1989), and I had an intense training in art history, philosophy of art (aesthetic), and art making. This training occurred in the frame of a modernist academic European curriculum in which Postmodernism was, I think, an academic "pose" or fashion, the rare sibling of Modernism. Though *Painting* was my career specialization, I had the good fortune of attending a nine-months course devoted exclusively to the study and practice of *the performance* as a specific genre of *action art*. This created an excellent opportunity for me to integrate my interdisciplinary personal art experiences and interests. Through the practice of this art genre, different art languages such as dancing, sound-vocal expression, sculpture, painting, installation, and photography, were integrated within a context of ongoing collaborative work. In addition, our performances were always planned or spontaneously assigned to be performed in different social and cultural institutions or public spaces. Dialogue and communication took place in both the faculty and the metropolitan area of the city of Valencia. Overall, it was a period in which a personal process of consistency through the study and practice of

different art languages and their inherent forms of knowledge, was fused with the understanding of art as a human, social, cultural, and historical construction. Within this understanding, I discovered art as it referred to both objects/processes shaped by surrounding realities, and, simultaneously, as an agent of transformation of all these realities.

After I completed my undergraduate studies, I went through a more solitary and reflective personal/professional period in which art teaching (in both public and private settings) and art making (painting and *performance*) were my two principal activities. It happened in 1994 and 1995, that I considered the idea of starting graduate studies in art education. This decision was linked to the two consecutive experiences that I had when organizing, collaborating and attending two workshops entitled "Introduction to Art Therapy".

These workshops were led by a German art therapist, Gabrielle Wisbar, and were conducted in my painting studio. This art therapist was at that time a member of an interdisciplinary group of professionals working in a psychosomatic clinic in Germany. In the context of my studio, she provided both a self-exploratory and group-centered approach to these experimental workshops. These workshops were designed for "normal" adults, and not for individuals labelled as "patients" who suffer mental disorders or pathologies. In addition, no previous artistic or creative training was required of the workshops participants.

Within an interdisciplinary approach, the methodology of these workshops were mainly based on an interconnected corpus of activities in which **body/mind exploration**, **art making** (individual and collective), and **communication** (as both inter- and

intrasubjective dialogue), were the three basic tools of the creative-learning experience. In this context, the most subtle and intimate aspects of the individual were easily integrated into the collective dimension of the group. This was achieved through the use of the above mentioned methodology, and the creation of a non-competitive atmosphere made up of both self-acceptance and mutual respect. All of the participants (six and nine in the respective workshops), as well as the group leader and I, felt highly empowered by these experiences. Some of the individuals who previously felt incapable of expressing anything through art making felt self-confident and capable after completing these workshops. For those of us who had an extensive training in visual arts, these workshops meant an opportunity to be freed from personal established ways of "thinking-doing" and to connect our art making with a fresher and broader self-actualization. Common to all of us was the empowered experience of having shared with others something that really matters: who we were individually and collectively at that specific time; how our uniqueness and differences were accepted and integrated in the commonality and wholeness of the group's identity. A simple concept, yet one that it is still difficult to experience in most of today's Western societies.

What was now different from my past "wonderful" group experiences as a painter/performer at the university? The answer is that in the context of these workshops the emphasis was not on "art" and, furthermore, it was not on "avant-garde art". The core of these experiences was the sharing of a human experience in which, through creativity, self exploration, and communication, the interior side of our individual identities had a temporal-spatial frame and connection within the group, and the richness of the individual experience was not something brought from outside or from the past to the present. The

richness and complexity of the individual experience was taking place just there, in the present time, and with the presence and support of the other/s.

In addition, the objective of these workshops was to enjoy and experience the knowledge of the experience in itself, not to create an artistic, cultural product for others. This was associated with the fact that artistic training was not required from the participants, nor were specific aesthetic results expected. Another difference was that these workshop experiences were naturally transforming the otherwise neutral space of the room into a space of ritual and ceremony. The incorporation of silence, also, as the context in which intra dialogues evolve, was conferring a sort of "spherical wholeness" or "psychological spatial balance", to the total process of creation and communication. The interior/exterior sides of our dialogues were integrated into a dynamic, creative, and cohesive experience in which present time was providing its structural core. Through these experiences, I learnt that the individual and the group are not antagonistic realities but interdependent aspects of a common well being if the "proper" psychological, cultural and social conditions are created in order for them to enrich each other.

After having these workshop experiences, a thought was shaped in my mind: ***If art as an experience is such a potentially powerful path for both personal discovery and integration of the individual within the collective, why not then explore and develop the specific methodologies that will facilitate the acquisition of these goals in society?***

## Landing in a New World

Due to the fact that Concordia offered three complete graduate programs in Art (Visual Arts, Art Education, and Art Therapy), I thought of this setting as one that I could

find an interdisciplinary context in which to explore my personal educational project. The reality of these programs, however, was that there was almost no interdepartmental exchange, and almost no collaborative and interdisciplinary projects. Certainly, in Concordia's Fine Arts Faculty, artists, educators, and art therapists seem to belong to completely different spheres of reality.

By contrast, what I did find and developed in the art education department at Concordia University is a very intense and creative experience based on reflection and epistemological research. Both reflection and epistemological research have, indeed, given expansion, consistency, and continuity to the body of my experiential knowledge. They have been the agents of an essential, deep process of personal reconstruction in which the intimate and personal have been organically integrated within the cultural, philosophical, and historical aspects of the art education field.

## The Link

Within the context of my last two studio courses at Concordia, I found a forum that allowed for a creative atmosphere and supported a way of integrating my interdisciplinary background as part of the required presentations of my ongoing studio practice. Through the art language of the performance, my work presentations became an integrated body of expression in which the use of the physical space of the classroom, dancing, music, slide projection of my paintings and, overall, a non verbal dialogue between students, teachers, and myself gave more plenitude and consistency to my artistic trajectory. It was in this context that a friend mentioned to me an outdoor, multidisciplinary program of rehabilitation for children called the ***Spiral Garden***.

Everything about this place and its people sounded perfect to me, the whole program took place in a garden where the visual arts and crafts were interconnected with linguistic, musical and performance activities! We talked about the possibility of me working as a volunteer in this setting and becoming a member of this interdisciplinary team. It was clear to me I would benefit from such an experience!

My main objective in participating as an artist/art educator volunteer in the Spiral Garden's program of the Summer 2000, was to integrate both my interdisciplinary background and the body of theoretical-reflective experiences encountered at Concordia University. On the one hand, the Spiral Garden appeared to me as an alternative program to the standard academic curriculum of art and healing-through-art. On the other hand, it also offered me a specific context in which to make action research about some of the educational themes that have become central to my current educational philosophy, and about some of the theoretical debates that took place in Concordia University. With regard to my own philosophy, one of the most important educational themes I wanted to reflect on was the connection between *Environment* and *Art Education*.

## Objectives

The objectives of my thesis are:

- to report and reflect on both the art, and art teaching/learning practices that are individually and socially experienced in the multidisciplinary children's program of Spiral Garden, and
- to analyze how this research has contributed to my evolving understanding of the art teaching/learning philosophy in an art education context.

## ( II ) THE SETTING

### History of Spiral Garden

Spiral Garden was created in 1984 by Nancy Brown, Paul Hogan and Michelle Jennings under the auspices of the Creative Arts Department of Hugh MacMillan Rehabilitation Centre for children in Toronto. The aim was to offer the children with disabilities the opportunity to be outdoors and to integrate neighbourhood children into the setting. After the merging of Bloorview and Hugh MacMillan medical centres in 1996, and as an answer to the petition signed by parents and children of the Bloorview site, two members of Spiral Garden envisioned the possibility of designing and opening a new program for that site. In the spring of 1997, artistic coordinator Bohdan Petryk and program coordinator Jan Mackie created the Cosmic Bird Feeder, an outdoor program similar to Spiral Garden. Both sites receive children with and without disabilities, though children with special needs make up approximately 60% of the population. Presently, the children who attend the program of Spiral Garden come from the community (mainly from the city of Toronto) and from the MacMillan Centre. Families who are staying at the motel while their children receive treatment and children selected from other camps are also welcomed to the Summer courses.

During the months of July and August there are 60 to 75 children (between the ages of five and twelve years) on site each day, with 15 staff members, plus both facilitators and volunteers. The staff consists of an interdisciplinary group of professional artists (actors, musicians, textile designers, painters and storytellers among many others), educators, art therapists, social workers and gardeners.

The Spiral Garden program begins each year with the planting of the garden in Spring and concludes with a harvest festival in Autumn, but the most intense period of activities runs three days per week for four two-week sessions in July and August. In the months prior to and following the summer program, Spiral Garden offers alternative educational activities to schoolchildren and community groups.

## Approach and Philosophy of Spiral Garden

Spiral Garden is an outdoor alternative program of rehabilitation for children (with and without disabilities) which offers a holistic, multidisciplinary and community-based approach. This program consists, according to its member's declarations, of three interconnected activities: **gardening**, **art making**, and **playing**. Even though rehabilitation is at the origin and centre of Spiral Garden's history and approach, it is also important to highlight that the processes of rehabilitation are understood in this setting within a social, and ecological context. Therefore, the notion of rehabilitation in Spiral Garden

> extends beyond the physical to the emotional and the ecological. It accomplishes this by joining the practice of gardening with the cultivation of the arts; visual, linguistic and musical. In this context, rehabilitation is defined as rehabitation of one's body, one's mind/imagination and one's place on the earth in equal balance and in interconnection. (Spiral Garden unpublished document, 1993).

Consequently, play and creativity, empathy and imagination, responsibility and commitment, are seen as essential tools for healing and transformation. In addition, healing and transformation do not belong exclusively to children with disabilities but to the total

body of the community, the earth, and the planet. This sacredness and inclusive approach is at the core of Spiral Garden's philosophy and is clearly expressed by the staff members in a publicity brochure (2000) that gives a description of the ideal candidate that Spiral Garden seeks:

> We seek out persons who have an understanding and practice of their own creative process. They have a desire to work in collaboration with other artists and specially the children to explore the myriad of ways that we can individually and collectively express ourselves. They are working to be *present* and support the children in their explorations. They have a sense of the sacredness of the earth and all life.

Another text, an unpublished document (1993) whose enumerative and repetitive style is reminiscent of a manifesto or prayer, states:

- Spiral Garden is integrated and inclusive. Rehabilitation occurs through a culture of caring for everything in the garden setting, that is, people, plants, animals.
- Spiral Garden is continuity. Rehabilitation occurs through the ongoing facilitation of the whole person to overcome fragmentation and alienation.
- Spiral Garden embodies hope. Rehabilitation occurs through living the earth's cycles of life, death and rebirth.

(...)

- Spiral Garden is community and connection. Rehabilitation occurs in the context of neighbourhood which includes family members, siblings and friends.
- Spiral Garden is interdependence. Rehabilitation occurs through the inter connection of body, mind, emotion, and spirit.
- Spiral Garden is a mystery. Rehabilitation occurs through the wonder of exploration.

- Spiral Garden is make believe. Rehabilitation occurs through faith in the healing potential of our innate creativity.
- Spiral Garden is never-ending story. Rehabilitation occurs through the narrative of the person, the people and the planet.

These inter linked affirmations gives us an idea of the contrast that exists between the philosophy of Spiral Garden and the empiricist, mechanicist philosophical model of the traditional scientific Western paradigm, which to a greater or lesser extent has been the dominant context of the official curriculum in education up to the present day. Certainly, by using words such as *spirit, mystery, faith,* or *make believe* to express and ground their ideological and vital position, Spiral Garden members set up a body of interactive operative principles which identify them as an alternative group in the current educational, medical, and cultural context. It is an alternative group not merely because it uses such words but because they are used in an ideological system in which assumed antagonistic polarities of the dominant positivist paradigm are connected and integrated within a different understanding. Traditional oppositions such as body vs. mind, science vs. spirit, rational vs. intuitive-imagination do not operate in the Spiral Garden philosophy. This is not to say that the differences between each term and the reality that it represents are blurred; rather they are accepted and articulated within a different system of meaning. It is different because in this system of meaning and reality there is space, embedded in the word *mystery*, for the unknown, and the exclusive relationship of opposition is substituted by the inclusive relationship of interdependence.

To summarize, it is the awareness of the vital interconnection that exists among all the facets of the human universe, in which humans are only one part of a wholeness, what

makes Spiral Garden's approach holistic. Another important aspect that reinforces the holistic approach of this community is its ecological concern. This concern has been manifested during the last 17 years through the cultivation of a floral, vegetable and herbal garden. In this setting, the garden is the physical body in which all experiences, both individual and collective, take place. However, this physical body in itself is not considered as neutral or lacking in emotional and spiritual significance. As the publicity brochure of the program (2000) puts it, "Spiral Garden is a sanctuary for the imagination and creative energy of children".

What role do arts and crafts play in this program? In Spiral Garden, arts and crafts are the vehicle through which children may express their interior world and communicate with both nature and the community. The emphasis of these artistic activities is in its expressive and communicative aspects, and the children are invited to explore them in a non competitive, recreational, and open atmosphere. Learning in this context is expected to happen through the children's decision making, playing, and exploring. Adults in this context are animators, facilitators, and supporters of children's decisions and experiences. Another important characteristic is that both the arts and the crafts means are offered in Spiral Garden as a **multidisciplinary** program of activities and languages. Activities and areas such as painting, weaving, singing, dancing, drama, ceramics, woodwork, drumming, gardening, beading, and maskmaking are genuine languages that facilitate children's self-expression and communication. Through the creation of images, artefacts, parades, processions, stories and songs, a dialogue of self-generation enables the integration of both individual and group identities. This postulate is made explicit in the following words from one of their publicity brochures (2000): "art is the means by which

children communicate and express their needs, desires and visions with the outside world. Through individual and collective art making we develop and nurture our local culture" Art is understood in this setting, therefore, as a vehicle of cultural identity in which both individual and collective human dimensions are integrated.

The activity of play, also, has an essential role in Spiral Garden philosophy. As staff members state "through the spirit and process of play we give ourselves over to the joyful expression of life and the flow of creation. Through play we find our place and role in the unfolding of the world". (S.G. publicity brochure, 2000). In this context, therefore, play's role is not only a children developmental convenience and an educational strategy but also a vital attitude that allows both children and adults to participate in the celebration of life.

To conclude, the inclusive philosophy of Spiral Garden is both earth-centered and child-centered, and all its proposals and activities are directed to the objective of building an evolving **community** through the practice of play, art, and gardening.

## ( III ) LITERATURE REVIEW

### The Child Revolution

During the first decades of the twentieth century, advances made in the fields of psychology, art, and education opened up a new understanding of the child which initiated a decisive debate within the history of education. In the American context, this debate was expressed as a war between two opposing theories: "the doctrine of discipline and the doctrine of growth" (Rugg and Shumaker, 1969, p.34). These two opposing "doctrines" were the philosophical embodiment of two antagonistic educational practices: *traditional* and *progressive* education. For *traditional* educators, the subject-matter was the centre, the starting-point from which the children's curriculum was designed, and the child was contemplated as "simply the immature being who is to be matured; ...the superficial being who is to be deepened" (Dewey, 1943, p.8). On the contrary, for *progressive* educators the child was the starting-point, the centre from which subject-matter and curriculum organically evolved to nurture the child's successive processes of growth. John Dewey (1938), the main defender and theorist of the *progressive* movement, positions the latter in relation to the traditional approach to education as follows:

> To imposition from above is opposed expression and cultivation of individuality; to external discipline is opposed free activity; to learning from texts and teachers, learning through experience; to acquisition of isolated skills and techniques by drill, is opposed acquisition of them as means of attaining ends which make direct vital appeal; to preparation for a more or less remote future is opposed making the most of the opportunities of present life; to static aims and materials is opposed acquaintance with a changing world. (pp. 19-20)

It was in the 1920s, and in the context of the progressive schools, that the "child-centered theories" started to be applied in the classroom. This was a period in which "the child-centered movement in general education, expressionism in painting, and a number of other social forces began to focus attention on self-expression and originality" (Lanier, 1982, p.141).

## Conceptions in Art Education

Basically, all the different conceptions of art education which have evolved since the 1920s up until today may be grouped in philosophical and curricular systems whose educational purposes derive mainly from:

- The child as the symbol and "fact" of the individual and the artist. (Child-centered and therapeutic approaches: Self-expression and Expressionism).
- Social, political, and environmental concerns. (Social-centered approaches: Instrumentalism and Reconstructionism).
- Aesthetic, formal, historical, and sociological concerns about art as a language. (Discipline-centered approaches: Formalism and Visual Literacy).
- An integration of different perspectives. (Psychological-anthropological approaches within the conception of art as a language).

Although not one of these conceptions exists in a pure state, that is, without participation or inclusion in some or all of the other approaches, each of them predominantly emphasizes some values over others within a theoretical/vital system. The main purpose for this classification is to lend structural clarity to this segment of my research. In addition, I have selected a single author to exemplify and personalize each of these

conceptions but without assuming or implying that each theoretical conception is totally equal to its representative art educator.

Child-centered approaches. Victor Lowenfeld.

Within the psychological and therapeutic conception of art education, the pioneering scientific research and extensive writing-lecturing of Victor Lowenfeld stand in the panorama of the 1940s and 1950s as the most prominent contribution to the child-centered movement. In Lowenfeld's philosophy, the entire function and meaning of art and art-making is re-created and re-thought from the life of the evolving child, as he explains below:

> Art is a dynamic and unifying activity, with a potentially vital role in the education of our children. The process of drawing, painting, or constructing is a complex one in which the child brings together diverse elements of his experience to make a new and meaningful whole. In the process of selecting, interpreting, and reforming these elements, he has given us more than a picture or a sculpture; he has given us a part of himself: how he thinks, how he feels, and how he sees. (Lowenfeld, 1970, p. 3)

Therefore, through the children's art-making, the teacher and the adult may access the otherwise hidden dimension of the children's world; art-making and self expression are, basically, a bridge between both the child and the environment and the child and the adult. This functionality of art-making in Lowenfeld's conception is associated with an integral understanding of knowledge in which biological and instinctual factors constitute the organic substratum from which further development may occur. As Lowenfeld (1970) states, "very young children have a freedom to act without regard for the amount of

knowledge mankind has already amassed about such an action. Children learn to walk without an intellectual understanding of the motor control involved" (p. 5). In addition, he believes, the individual's "ability to learn involves not only intellectual capacity but also social, emotional, perceptual, physical, and psychological factors" (Lowenfeld, 1970, p. 4). From this perspective, Lowenfeld proposes an art curriculum based on direct and multi-sensorial experiences of the child in his environment more than a fixed body of contents and procedures. This emphasis on the experience itself as a conduct for both the acquisition of knowledge and the individual's development, is translated to the artistic media by stating that "the best preparation for creating is the act of creation itself". (Lowenfeld, 1970, p. 5). In addition, Lowenfeld (1970) strongly emphasizes the individuality and dynamism of the child by remarking that "no two children are alike, and, in fact, each child differs even from his earlier self as he constantly grows, perceives, understand, and interprets his environment" (p. 7). What are the implications of Lowenfeld's ideas about the child in his understanding of the teacher's role, the curriculum, and the general purpose of art education?

In Lowenfeld's view, the child possesses an inherent creative potential which in ideal circumstances (that is, without any negative external influence or interference provided by adults and/or the environment) should naturally, spontaneously, be expressed. This idealization of the child is present in the following words by Lowenfeld,

> If it were possible for children to develop without any interference from the outside world, no special stimulation for their creative work would be necessary. Every child would use his deeply rooted creative impulses without inhibition, confident in his own

means of expression. Whenever we hear children say, "I can't draw", we can be sure that some kind of interference has occurred in their lives. (Lowenfeld, 1970, p. 8)

Lowenfeld's position with regard to the art teacher's role derives from this conception of children. In Lowenfeld's view the art teacher should play a respectful and passive or "inhibited" role in regard to the children's creative processes within the educational context. As Lowenfeld (1970) explains,

> The teacher should recognize that his own learning experiences will avail children nothing, for it is the children's learning that becomes important in the educational process. It is not the adult's answer but the child's striving toward his own answer that is crucial. (p. 11)

In regard to the curriculum, some of Lowenfeld's most important curricular attributes derive from the recognition that "art is not the same for a child as it is for an adult... for a child, art is primarily self expression" (Lowenfeld, 1970, p. 7). From this perspective, Lowenfeld establishes a hierarchical relationship between the art object and the art process in which the value of the art object is, or should be, subordinated to the art process. This thought is developed as follows,

> Often the mistake is made of evaluating children's creative work by how the product looks, its colours and shapes, its design qualities, and so forth. This is unjust not only to the product but even more to the child. Growth cannot be measured by the tastes or standards of beauty that may be important to an adult. However, art has been traditionally interpreted as relating mainly to aesthetics, and this concept has in some cases limited the opportunity for art to be used in its fullest sense. In art education the final product is subordinated to the creative process. It is the child's process --his

thinking, his feelings, his perceiving, in fact, his reactions to his environment-- that is important. (Lowenfeld, 1970, p. 9)

From these statements evolves the central and almost exclusive position that art making has within Lowenfeld's children art curriculum in which the study of art as a language, cultural construction, and historical legacy is excluded. Another characteristic attribute of Lowenfeld's curriculum is his prescriptive position towards the use of imitation in children's art education. Lowenfeld's warning against imitation as a way of learning is grounded on his psychological convictions and therapeutic approach towards the art practice and art teaching. In Lowenfeld's philosophy, self expression is a conduct towards a healthy self development while imitation may imply psychological and emotional dependency of the child with regard to the adult and, therefore, an obstacle for his proper development. Using Lowenfeld's (1970) own words,

> The child who expresses himself according to his own level becomes encouraged in his own independent thinking and expresses his own thoughts and ideas by his own means. The child who imitates can become dependent in his thinking and rely for his thoughts and expression upon others. Because the imitative child cannot give expression to his own thoughts, his dependency upon others can lead to frustration... Art, through self-expression, can develop the self as the important ingredient in experience. Because nearly every emotional or mental disturbance is connected with a lack of self-confidence, it is easy to see how the proper stimulation of the child's creative abilities can provide a safeguard against such disturbances. (p. 19)

The above statements reflect the therapeutic emphasis of Lowenfeld's child-centered approach in art education, an approach in which art education is understood as an

instrument in the service of what he considers to be a balanced and integral development of the individual. Simultaneously, this individual development is understood as a means for the construction of a balanced community in which "to live cooperatively as well-adjusted human beings and to contribute creatively to such a society become most important objectives for education" (Lowenfeld, 1970, p. 17).

Social-centered approaches. Ronald W. Neperud.

Within the social-centered approaches, Ronald W. Neperud's *environmental design* program is a good example of an art teaching proposal in which theory, reflection, and practice evolve not from individual necessities/realities but from an ethical commitment with social and environmental problems. It is from the teacher's detection and personal involvement with the-problem-outside-there that the art curriculum is re-thought and planned. Starting from the recognition that,

> The physical and social disintegration of cities, the pollution of waterways with sewage and toxic chemicals, the destructive clearcutting of forests, the degradation of other natural habitats, and the crowding and overpopulation of communities are but a few contemporary environmental problems. (Neperud, 1995, p. 222)

Neperud (1995) proposes an educational program in which the objective of awakening and developing in all citizens, and more specifically in children and youth, "an awareness of the multiple and interconnected dimensions of their environment" (p. 222) is the starting point of his reconstructionist approach of art education.

In order to fully understand the social implications of the environmental design approach developed by Neperud, it is important to elucidate his understanding of

*environment* and *design* within the context of art education. As Neperud (1995) states, "mistakenly, commonsense environmental definitions have assumed humans to be in a separate and domineering role over their surroundings rather than interacting on a more reciprocal basis" (p. 224). However, he adds, the "recognition of social and cultural interfaces with environment represents the basis for developing a socially responsible environmental design education" (p. 224). Consequently, in Neperud's view *environment* is not a purely objective or neutral reality but a historical, social, political, and cultural construction which derives of specific human interactions within the natural world. Similarly, Neperud (1995) points out, "good design, like science, is not apolitical... if significant contextual issues are not addressed, ecological concerns result in little more than attractive art products" (229). It is within this reconstructivist approach in which both theory and practice attend to transform society and the environment that Neperud highlights the importance of engaging students in a broad, concrete, and personal perspective of social responsibility.

With regard to the role played by the art teacher and the art curriculum in an environmental design art education, Neperud (1995) states, "teachers must recognize their own and students' environments and avoid prepackaged curricular materials contradictory to their own situations" (p. 235) because, "the curriculum resides not in curriculum guides or experts specifications, but in the texture of each community" (p. 236). In contrast with the more passive art teacher role defended by Lowenfeld, we find in Neperud the defence of an art teacher who is both a catalyst within the educational and social community and an active collaborator/member of such community. Overall, art education in Neperud's educational approach is envisioned as an interdependent practice within a total cultural,

social, ecological, educational, and political system. Within this embodied system --the community-- "education must insist in those values that lead to democracy and social and economic justice" (Neperud, 1995, p. 232). In Neperud's approach, art education is, therefore, an instrument to promote not the "proper" individual development but the transformation of the society in what he considers to be the "proper" direction through the construction of an environmental critical/creative awareness.

Discipline-centered approaches. Vincent Lanier.

Within the discipline-centered approaches, Vincent Lanier openly defies and reject an instrumentalist conception of art and art education. As he states, "almost every human activity is a clear alternative to making art for the purposes art educators have traditionally cited; conversely, there is no alternative to studying art if our purpose is to learn about it" (Lanier, 1982, p. 167). From Lanier's point of view,

> aesthetic itself is the critical insight, the primary art discipline that should be taught in our classrooms, since it is the one knowledge which applies to every aspect of our lives... In order to teach it properly, the study of aesthetic should include some art history and art criticism, and specially the sociology of art, as supporting material. (Lanier, 1991, p. 16)

Lanier's declaration above clearly shows how the *study* of art more than the *practice* of art plays an essential, central role in his conception of art education. For Lanier, art as a specific language, and as a social, historical, cultural, and aesthetic phenomenon, is the central body of knowledge from which art teaching methodology and curriculum should evolve in the classroom. In terms of this centrality of art-as-discipline, Lanier (1991)

classified and summarized the whole history of art education as follows: "in our history there have been two major emphases in purpose since our earliest days; personal development *through* art and learning *about* art" (p. 13). If learning about art implies, primarily, learning about aesthetic, it is convenient, I think, to know what is Lanier's definition of aesthetic. As he explains, "talk about one specific work of art is criticism, while talk about all works of art, or all paintings, or all architecture, when such talk inquires into the nature of these or how we respond to them, is aesthetic" (Lanier, 1991, p. 18). Building on Dewey, Lanier (1991) defines *aesthetic response* as "a human basic reaction, pervasive to living, involved in much more than simply the individual/fine arts equation" (p. 15). With regard to the art curriculum and the classroom, Lanier (1991) reinforces and expands the same thought to include a variety of objects and environments as the proper domain of aesthetic response:

> The world of objects and events capable of eliciting aesthetic response is much wider than the fine arts, or even those objects society tells us are deliberately designed to perform that task. If I understand Dewey correctly, he is saying that all objects with which we deal are, potentially, aesthetic objects. Hence, the popular arts, the folk arts, the advertising arts, the industrial arts, the mass media, and even natural objects, are all within the purview of what can and should be studied in the classroom as art. (p. 14)

In addition to this expansion of the formal academic subject-matter, Lanier defends a model of art teaching in which a hierarchical distinction/classification of the art materials and skills, such as fine arts vs. crafts, is abolished. When considering art,

> as a social construct, serving social purposes, and reflecting the developments of society... one cannot argue that the fine arts are as a class superior to the so-called

vernacular arts or to natural objects in aesthetic potential... Consequently, the content of the art curriculum must be broadened to include a much wider range of art materials" (Lanier, 1991, p. 12)

In regard to the art teacher's role, Lanier proposes an educational model in which two different types of art teachers would be required, the general art teacher and the studio art teacher. The general teacher would be the one who

> would need to have a sound knowledge of aesthetic, art history, art criticism, and the sociology of art. Familiarity with studio production in a wide range of media would be included, but being a producing or exhibiting artist would not be particularly desirable. When a specific item in the general art curriculum could best be taught by having pupils work with art materials, or when dealing with someone who makes art professionally would be valuable, the general art teacher would have the studio art teacher in the school or elsewhere in the district available as a resource person. (Lanier, 1991, p. 43)

Within this model of specialization, Lanier rejects today's broadly accepted ideas defended by Lowenfeld five decades ago in which the practice more than the study of art was associated to an integral personal development and to a general improvement of *creativity*. In Lanier's opinion, "perhaps traditional development benefits might be viewed as accidental side effects, welcome if they occur, but not deserving of instructional attention. I exempt diagnosis and therapy through art, which is now a separate discipline known as Art Therapy" (Lanier, 1991, p. 16). This strong refusal to valorize the psychological factors involved in the practice of art (such as learner-teacher behaviour and educational environment) is also related to a very specific understanding of human emotions. From

Lanier's (1991) perspective, "unless we are talking about the amoeba, emotional experiences are mediated through the brain. The more knowledge we accumulate, the better able we become to enjoy a broad range of stimuli aesthetically" (p. 22). Therefore, for Lanier the teaching and learning of aesthetics, and the specific knowledge of art as a social and historical language, is the principle vehicle to improve the capacity/quality of the learner's aesthetic experiences, and this constitutes the main purpose of his educational approach. The following statement by Lanier (1991) shows clearly his reaction against psychological art teaching approaches, and the intrinsic and autonomous value that he confers to the study of art and the aesthetic response:

> The last 50 years or so of art education history has been an unfortunate exercise in misdirection caused, in part, by our ideological dependence on ideas borrowed from psychology... art education has been headed in the wrong direction, oblivious of its principal obligation to the young, which is to develop a citizenry knowledgeable about the nature of their aesthetic responses and about the arts that are available in the world around them for such experience. (p.16)

Psychological-anthropological approaches within the conception of art as a language. June King McFee.

Within the approaches of art education which can not be easily included into a single category, stands the educational philosophy of June King McFee. At the core of McFee's approach lies an organic and holistic understanding of art, and art education. In her view, "art education is not a distinct discipline... it is linked with many fields. First of all it is art, a basic form of *communication*" (McFee, 1961, p. 6). Therefore, as a form of

communication art shares with language a fundamental role in the history of human development, and "children have to learn both forms of communication in order to operate successfully as civilized human beings" (p. 6). In contrast with Lowenfeld's approach, McFee emphasizes that art as a process of communication embraces much more than self-expression; it is both emission/transmission and reception/interpretation, and this implies viewing the child as both a potentially creator and an interpreter/consumer. In addition, the practice of art is more than a developmental *convenience*; it is a *necessity* within the parameters of culture and civilization. In contrast with Lanier, McFee does not deny the implications of psychological factors in the practice of art education. On the contrary, she strongly emphasizes the emotional and psychological factors which are involved in the processes of learning and teaching and proposes to integrate them within an anthropological understanding of the function of art. As McFee (1961) explains,

> Psychology---the study of the individual---cannot be separated from anthropology---the study of the group. Our attitudes about art have evolved from our culture, our background of experience. For this reason we study behaviour from both psychological and anthropological points of view. (p. 6)

Another concern of art education, McFee adds (1961), is "the elementary curriculum, the planning and sequence of meaningful experiences that help children develop their means of visual communication" (p. 7). In order to achieve one of the main purposes of art education "the development of the creative potential of children" (p. 129), McFee configured her perception-delineation theory (P-D). Recognizing that "learning in the classroom occurs to the degree that experiences are geared to the differences among children in each of the traits needed for art activities" (p. 147), McFee defines the P-D

theory as "a framework in which the individual variables that affect art production are identified" (p. 164). The P-D theory consists, basically, in four interrelated points or aspects in which the fourth one, *the creative process* or *delineation*, is based on three other previous points. These previous points are: *readiness* (child's culture, personality and development), *the psychological environment* (positive and/or negative environmental influences on the child's behavior), and *information handling* (present ability to handle detail in the organization of visual information). From McFee's view, then, the creative process evolves from interdependent and preceding factors.

Within this approach, the creative process is not the result of an unconditional reaction attached to some fixed personal attributes of the child but a process based on dynamic, complex, and interdependent factors in which the child's past experiences, culture, and personality converge in his/her encounter with the art materials. From this perspective, the art teacher is the one who should first explore children's differences in order to design the specific pedagogical strategies which would potentially improve children's creative abilities. This active and guiding role of the art teacher is highlighted by McFee (1961) with the following words: "part of our obligations as teachers is to broaden the range of children's understanding, to help them see more relationships, to give them a wider base for creative thinking and action" (p. 141). With regard to the creative process, McFee (1961) reinforces this understanding of the teacher's role by pointing out that

> the teacher becomes the catalyst for creative behavior. Up to this time, in understanding readiness, in creating supportive psychological environment, and in helping children utilize and organize the stimulations they have been exposed to, the teacher has been preparing them for the creative process. (p.163)

Simultaneously, the role of the art teacher as a curriculum planner in McFee's approach is included in a much broader educational goal. In McFee's words, "the major role of the classroom teacher is to prepare children to deal creatively and effectively with the challenges of life" (1961, p. 7).

With regard to the specific environmental concern strongly defended by Neperud, McFee (1998) points out,

> Some of us have felt that art education should be expanded to include critical study of design in the environment as an integral part of art education. The ability to use aesthetic criteria to create qualities and symbolize values in human environments is particularly crucial now that space and other resources are becoming so limited and are being shared by people of such diverse backgrounds. (p. 136)

To summarize, in McFee's approach educational purposes derive from a child-centered pedagogy in which individual differences and intrinsic values of art as a language are strongly emphasized and recognized as an essential part of her methodology (P-D theory). Unlike Lowenfeld, she confers educational status to the artistic quality of children's artworks in her curriculum but, at the same time, she emphasizes the necessity of adapting such a curriculum to the capacities and necessities of the individual child. In addition, her understanding of art as a language of communication brings attention to both dimensions of the child: the creator, or potentially creator, and the interpreter and consumer within a specific cultural context. In agreement with Lanier, McFee consider as important the development of the critical and reflective role of the child through art education but she does not concede any priority, however, to this learner's aspects in the curriculum. In McFee's conception, practising both art making and critical/reflective

aesthetic interpretation, and responding aesthetically to the environment in order to transform it are interrelated and integrated aspects of an inclusive and evolving understanding of art education.

## Child Development Theories

Children's art curricula in today's Western societies are based on the recognition of the child as an individual whose capacities and necessities for learning are related to developmental stages. The interpretation of how and when these developmental stages take place, and the emphasis put on them with regard to children's art production, however, has significantly changed since Lowenfeld's theories were formed and widely accepted.

According to fixed bio-genetic factors, Lowenfeld classified adults and children as either haptic or visual. These categories were based on two different space-orientation behaviors not influenced by training and individual experience. As McFee (1961) explains, Lowenfeld "describes the haptic child as one who is most dependent on his own feelings (emotional and bodily) in orienting himself to his world" (p. 156). By contrast, "the visual child depends more on his visual environment" (p. 156). In addition, Lowenfeld's theory of developmental stages in art postulated five clearly defined phases as indicative of all patterns of growth in children. These five phases may be synthesized as follows:

- **Scribbling** (2-4 year old), the child marks straight, oval, or circular strokes on the paper or plastic surface.
- **Pre-schematic** (4-7 year old), the child assigns symbolic representation and meaning to the scribbles.

- **Schematic** (7-9 year old), the child repeats and masters a set of personal symbols.
- **Dawning realism** (9-11), those symbols become more realistic.
- **Pseudo-realism** (11-13), the wish and intent of representing with realism increase in the child.

With regard to Lowenfeld's theories of space-orientation and children's developmental stages, Lanier (1982) elucidates his position critically:

> while Lowenfeld almost singlehandedly made scientific research in the visual arts respectable at a time when it was far from acceptable, he also imposed on child development in art a rigidity of structure from which it still suffers in some of its thinking and writing. (p.178)

From this perspective, and in contrast with Lowenfeld, Lanier defends a much more loose, simplified, and general theory of child development. According to Lanier (1982), there are three main stages of art production in the phases of growth of the child:

- **The scribble or manipulative stage,** in which the "manipulative activities appear at some point between the first and the third year of the child's growth and continue in a relatively repetitive fashion" (p. 169).
- **The period of symbolism**, which "appears at some time between the child's second and fifth year and consists of the rendering of what might be called shorthand signs or "symbols" which provide at least a temporarily satisfactory depiction of the desired objects" (p. 169).
- **The period of natural or realistic representation**, which appears with the child's puberty and in which "rendering becomes increasingly natural or realistic and, at a final point, unsatisfactory" (p. 174). In Lanier's words, "almost without exception, everyone

seems to reach this point, and, indeed, very few of us progress beyond it without some sort of formal instruction" (p. 174).

In a further development from Lowenfeld's initial set of developmental premises, McFee (1961) states that "developmental stages are inadequate as bases for determining art behaviour. Past experience, environment, and many other variables do not follow an age pattern" (p. 164). She argues that mental age and not chronological age is "a better basis for identifying developmental stages in art". To fully understand McFee's perspective on growth and child development, it is convenient, I think, to introduce these theories within the general perspective of her art and art education philosophy. Certainly, it is from her understanding of art and reality as the result of individual and cultural-environmental factors that McFee coherently defends:

1. an art teaching/learning based on individual variation instead of fixed and continuous age-based patterns of growth (psychological dimension), and
2. an art teaching/learning based on the understanding of growth as the result of environmental and cultural influences (anthropological dimension).

Therefore, without totally denying some general biological human factors and individual genetic conditions as agents of the developmental stages of the child, McFee (1961) emphasizes that "a pattern of growth for a child at age seven may not be his pattern at age ten" (p. 73). In addition, patterns of cultural symbolism, and artistic training are constitutive aspects of the individual patterns of development and art behaviour. The so-called "organismic" psychological approach that gives support to these theories consists of the following premises:

> Although growth or function of any part can be measured by itself, it can never be considered as truly separable from the other parts. The activity of the whole organism is the interaction of parts and is thus dependent on each part's stage of development. (pp. 73-74)

Based on this theory, McFee states that the physical, emotional, psychological and cognitive aspects of the child at any specific age are changing and interdependent factors of his/her total development within a specific cultural and environmental context.

## Community-based Art Education

The community-based approach present in the Spiral Garden program is what stands out in my literary research as one of the most relevant alternatives to the official curriculum offered by artists and art educators in the context of postmodern educational theories and practices. Certainly, in spite of the eclectic panorama that exists today in the world of art education, it seems that community-based art programs are significantly advocated, or at least recognized, by individuals or groups who otherwise hold different positions with regard to the basic aims or purposes of the practice of art and art education. A majority of them introduce community-based art education as an emergent solution within a contemporary conflicting map of reality. What I would like to highlight is how different authors, despite their differences, find some unanimity with regard to a community-based art education approach.

An important contribution to the understanding and development of the community-based approach in art education comes from the art teacher Peter London, whose educational theories evolve from the child-centered approaches initiated by John

Dewey and Victor Lowenfeld. The community-based art education program proposed by London (1994) is based on the recognition that "teachers can't do it alone and schools can't do it alone (...). The essential partners in effective education are children, their parents, teachers, administrators, and local citizens. That's the team. If any member is missing, the whole effort suffers" (p. xiii). Awareness of this interdependency has, certainly, enormous implications for the way in which art education is planned and experience, implications that directly affect children's life experiences. In this respect, London (1994) explains the relationship between the community and creativity:

> The community is the web of life that inextricably embraces, defines, and empowers children and adults alike. Using the school as its base of operations, community-based art education forays out into the community for its motivation and its subject matter. The community is the arena for the creative expression of personal encounters with one's environment, one's web of life. (p.4)

In London's program, therefore, the school plays the role of being the starting point and context from which both children and teachers develop an increasing dialogue with the environment and the community. I also want to underline that this educational view postulated by London is organically linked to his defence of a child-centered theory. As London (1994) puts it, "not only does schooling often substitute secondhand experience for raw reality, it also fosters a passive intellect through a school day composed of adult-designed, prearranged problems that neither emerge from nor relate back to the actual lives of children" (p.11).

From a different angle, Neperud contributes important reflections about an art education based on specific community contexts. Starting from what seems to be the core

of all community-based education, the understanding that "there is a vital link between education and daily living in which education is not confined to schools alone, but involves a reintegrative effort between the entire community and schools" (Neperud, 1995, p.230), Neperud emphasizes the current context of social and environmental problems. In Neperud's reflection, the convenience and ethical imperative of bringing to the art education curriculum awareness and exploration of social and environmental problems, necessarily drives to a community-based art education. As he argues, "social and environmental problems are revealed not through abstract generalizations, but through the specificity of particular community contexts" (p.232). In agreement with Neperud, McFee (1998) states

> To encourage the development of environmental design as well as introducing it as a professional concert of the art teachers, there is need for both systematic curriculum development as well as cooperation with adults who are concerned with community design problems. (p. 151)

In earlier days, Lanier (1982) did not directly propose a community-based approach as a central pedagogical strategy/necessity of his curriculum but he pointed out the expansion of the domain of education taking place in his day,

> The conception of the art education professional as to what constitutes the proper domain of art education has slowly but clearly begun to change in recent years. At one time --not too long ago-- our concentration, if not our sole concern, was with the teaching and practice of art in the schools. Now we are increasingly aware that we have an obligation not only to the institution of education but to other social activities as well. This expansion of interest includes: the out-of-school-adult, the elderly, the

media, the museums, the community centers and recreation, and the industrial and commercial world. All of these people and agencies are involved not only in art of one kind or another, but they participate in art education or art learning. They are no less than the school, a part of the province of art teaching. (p. 143)

How are all these approaches of community-based art education related to the community-based art program of Spiral Garden? A basic difference between Spiral Garden's program and the programs of London and Neperud, for example, is their referential position with regard to the official curriculum. While Spiral Garden is an alternative program working *outside* of the standard, institutional educational system, London and Neperud's programs stand as an alternative for children's education *inside* the established educational system. Both London and Neperud's programs offer alternatives and theories of community-based art education in which the school and the official curriculum are the initial reality of an evolving transformation. Another important factor is the specific children for who such programs have been designed. Certainly, in the official curriculum the child with disabilities is most often excluded or not mentioned while in Spiral Garden, the whole program evolves as a socio-educative alternative for these children. There are, however, many other examples of community-based art programs similar to Spiral Garden in which the school and the official curriculum are not the point of departure. Among these, are programs in the UK which have been developed by organizations that "seek to improve awareness and provision for disabled people" (Earnscliffe, 1992, p. 56).

*The Ark*, an organization founded by the peripatetic performer Penny Sanderson in the art centre of Bracknell's South Hill Park, is devoted to facilitating access to the arts for

people with learning difficulties. The philosophical content that inspires the practice of this organization is based on the belief that each and every individual has the right and power to contribute in a special manner to specific art projects. As quoted by Earnscliffe (1992), Sanderson states:

> Art is the only facility I know that can offer people with learning difficulties the opportunity to express their own view of the world. For disempowered people with few words at their disposal, music, dance, drama and visual arts provide an alternative vocabulary and the chance to become eloquent. (p. 57).

Supported by both official organisms and a large body of volunteers, *The Ark* offers an intense whole year program in which "in any given week up to 30 artists and about 100 students with learning difficulties -- from schools, day centres and hospitals -- are involved" (Earnscliffe, 1992, p. 57). Within an interdisciplinary approach, *The Ark* culminates its annual program of activities with a summer festival in which all the art forms are integrated in a collaborative performance.

Another example of an extracurricular interdisciplinary community-based approach is provided by a London-based band of musicians and designers who in 1983 formed *Echo City*. All of *Echo City*'s projects have been conceived to incorporate both disabled and non-disabled people into public performances in which, through the fusion of music and the visual arts, permanent installations and new environments are created. As Earnscliffe (1992) explains, the main artistic aim of this association consists of "turning musical instruments into permanent outdoor play structures or 'sonic playgrounds'" (p. 82). One of these projects, "Shimmer" is described by Earnscliffe as "a 15-metre-wide

sculpture comprising tuned lengths of aluminium bar suspended from parallel stainless steel cables, its notes being activated by rope bell-pull or the wind" (1992, p. 82).

The above examples constitute but a small representation of the whole disability arts movement which in Earnscliffe's words "has been a cogent force over recent years, instrumental in effecting change (...) through raising awareness of disability issues, and by increasing the visibility and status of disabled people (1992, p. 5). This disability arts movement is, without doubt, a clear example of how the current school and academic art programs cover only a small part of the needs of the current social and cultural context. In order to view this context from the perspective of two concrete issues which are present in my thesis, *art* and *disability*, I wish to finish this chapter with the following words by Adam Reynolds (an artist and a disabled man):

> Over the last decade or so disability has come very much to the fore as both a political and a cultural issue. Having been essentially a taboo subject for many years this 'coming out' has been fraught with difficulties -- laden with guilt, ignorance, anger, embarrassment and the like. It is in this context that people have worked with varying degrees of success to fill the gaps, gaps created by an assumption that disabilities debar people from being considered serious as either producers or consumers of art. (1992, p. 4)

## (IV ) THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### Approach and Methodology

The approach and methodology of my thesis are framed within the qualitative research paradigm. The selection of the qualitative research as a method of inquiry implies that the researcher is committed to a way of understanding knowledge. Within this understanding, the subjective experience and interpretation of the researcher with regard to a specific life context or environment is not only a valid method of research, it allows the evolution of genuine and important aspects of human knowledge. In addition, this knowledge will ultimately refer to life processes because life, in all its diversity, is the grounding context in which each and every human action takes place. As Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, and Steinmetz (1991) state:

> qualitative study is forged in the transaction among what is done and learned and felt by the researcher. It is an intensely recursive, personal process, and while this may be the hallmark of all sound research, it is crucial to every aspect of the qualitative way of looking at life (p. 1).

In accordance with this ideological position, knowledge is regarded as the result of a dynamic and interactive encounter between both the object of research and the researcher. Knowledge is, therefore, conditioned and constructed by the subject and all his/her individual capabilities /attributes in which feelings and emotions (as well as reason and analysis) count as integral components of the research processes. The particularity and complexity that derives from the qualitative research model (associated with other terms such as: *naturalistic inquiry*, *ethnographic methodologies* and *interpretive research*) is pointed out by Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, and Steinmetz (1991) as follows:

> Those who work within the naturalistic paradigm operate from a set of axioms that holds realities to be multiple and shifting, that take for granted a simultaneous mutual shaping of knower and known, and that see all inquiry, including the empirical, as being inevitably value-bound. (p.2)

Considering myself a researcher working within the naturalistic paradigm, I also want to underline that the qualitative research approach of my thesis is a coherent and necessary methodological condition to allow me to develop the global holistic approach of my investigation. If practising qualitative research implies to consider both the object of research and the researcher as inter dynamic realities from which evolve a new objective-subjective system of meanings, to approach holistically my thesis implies to emphasize the relationship of interdependency among all the parts of this new system.

Before defining, however, my understanding of the holistic approach I would like to introduce a short reflection about the term *holistic*. Since Jan Christiaan Smuts first used the word *holism* in his book *Holism and Evolution* in 1926 to defend "the exploration of matter, life, and mind in relation to each other, rather than as isolable realms of existence" (Craige, 1992, pp. 4-5), the word *holism* has been attached to a cohesive but varied model of reality and human interpretation. As Craige (1992) explains, during the last decades the term "*holistic* has been applied to approaches and attitudes, in the humanities and the social sciences as well as the sciences, that privilege study of a system over analysis of its parts" (p. 5). With regard to my investigation, I want to highlight that all the research processes of my thesis, participation, documentation, analysis, reflection, written construction and synthesis, evolve organically from my understanding of the object of research, Spiral Garden, as a whole which is organically linked with(in) other wholes.

One of these "other wholes" is constituted by my own self; another one is the culture in which the sub-culture of Spiral Garden is included, and another one, the most inclusive of them, is life itself. From this perspective, all the parts that constitute the object of my study are studied as interdependent realities of a dynamic and evolving reality in which the parts and the whole share reciprocal influences. This interdependent and inclusive perspective of meaning which is fundamental to the theoretical framework of my thesis is best summed up in the following statement by Arthur, R. Peterson (1977): "to recognize meaning is to be involved in what is whole".

Thus, placing myself within a holistic perspective implies cultivating an awareness of interconnectedness among all the realities and research processes that weave through my thesis.

## Procedures

As a researcher, this interdynamic and inclusive conception of the object of study, in which the study of my-self is also a part, has evolved from my role of participant-observant. In this sense, the data of my thesis are the result of an interplay between both my total immersion in the interactive field of the environment in which my inquiry took place, Spiral Garden, and my intent of being constantly present and aware of the evolving constellation of facts and meanings that constituted such an interactive field. With respect to this double role, Peggy R. Sanday's (1983) explanation about what participant observation demands from the researcher is quite illuminating:

> Participant observation demands complete commitment to the task of understanding. The ethnographer becomes part of the situation being studied in order to feel what it is

like for the people in that situation. In addition to the time required, participant observation saps one's emotional energy. The ethnographer who becomes immersed in other's people realities is never quite the same afterward. The total immersion creates a kind of disorientation--culture shock--arising from the need to identify with and at the same time to remain distant from the process being studied. (p. 20)

From this perspective, being a participant observant means, on one hand, to be open and flexible to the transformation that all new experiences --especially participation-- imply; on the other hand, to be an observer (mostly a viewer and listener) of the phenomena that are taking place around/within the researcher. Consequently, the main challenge of practising qualitative research as a participant observer is to select the most meaningful of the total simultaneous phenomena that are going on in the environment. In this overwhelming but creative psycho-emotional situation, openness, flexibility, personal selection, and agile interpretation constitute the immediate and essential attributes required from the researcher. Without doubt, the keystone of the participant observant procedure is this mindful and willing immersion into the novelty of the action within a new environment. In addition, it is within "a broad continuum of kinds and degrees of participating" (Ely and alt., 1991, p. 42), that the researcher must exercise not only his/her capacity for empathy but "also be able to record, categorize, and code what is being observed" (Sanday, 1983, p. 19).

The concrete research strategies that I have employed to obtain my data are the following:

1. During the first two-week course of July, I kept a daily manuscript of fresh and quick observations/reflections related to both the activities and patterns of behaviour of my

working environment and my personal experiences within it. Although this manuscript was partially written in Spiral Garden during my time as a participant, the majority of it was written after work hours.

2. During the second two-week course of the same month, I collected more than 30 slides in order to provide a body of visual documentation. This documentation was about both the environment and "the what and how" of the interactions of Spiral Garden. In addition, I began typing my final journal, which is an ordered selection and synthesis of the first manuscript. This journal is the source of the written data used in my thesis.

## Data

As mentioned above, the documentation of my research consists of both written and visual data. Before specifying the criteria used to structure these two different groups of data, I want to underline that the processes of selection that guided the collection of data occurred within two value-systems: the value-system of myself as a whole person, and the value-system of "art education" as a whole such as it informs my professional role as an art educator. From this perspective, the value-system which operated as a selector of the "worthy information" or data of my thesis, was and is the result of a negotiation between two personal commitments: the commitment to myself as a whole person (not only as an art educator) and the commitment to the art education field. Consequently, everything from the initial written impressions to the final body of data is the result of a process of permanent dialogue and negotiation between these two different loyalties which co-exist within me.

From another point of view, I have based the findings of my investigation on two different media of data because, as Sanday (1983) explains, "the main reason for employing a variety of data collection procedures is that it enables the investigator to cross check results obtained from observation and recorded in field notes" (p. 21).

The written data of my thesis consists of a body of selected passages from my diary in which I basically reported: (1) the total art-environment of Spiral Garden, (2) the patterns of behaviour and artistic-creative activities that took place in it, and (3) my experience of this interactive field or environment. Although references to these three aspects were made throughout the diary I did not write them in a systematic or cluster-spatial way but as a linear concatenation of a set of synchronic "exterior" and "interior" phenomena. In this sense, though observation and depiction constitutes a continuum in the written data, the nature of the observed and depicted "landscapes" are very different. While at some points the depiction focuses on artefacts or the human interaction in Spiral Garden --exterior and visible realities-- at others the linear narrative structure of the text introduces my feelings, thoughts, reflections, and imaginary associations --interior and invisible realities. In addition, the narrative thread of my diary evolves from a continuous present time perspective and from a subjective voice which is grammatically expressed by a first person singular or an inclusive "we". In other words, the flow of my written text resembles an imaginary focus or camera, my consciousness, from which all the various "landscapes" of my research environment emerge.

The visual data of my thesis consist of a body of images (digitally printed reproductions of twenty-two slides), which document both (1) the artefacts and (2) the art making process in Spiral Garden. It is important to remark that in contrast to the written

data, the visual data do not explicitly report about interior or invisible realities such as thoughts, feelings, and imagination. Therefore, the information provided by each of these two research procedures, the written data and the visual data collections, play different and complementary roles in my research.

Although the written data were obtained before the visual data, I have altered this order in the linear-temporal structure of my thesis. In Chapter VI, "Reflections", I first introduce the images, and then the written passages in order to use the latter to amplify the former. If the visual data introduce the reader into the physicality of Spiral Garden, exterior space, the written data add a subjective voice, interior space, to the visual information.

## Analysis of the data

For the analysis of the visual data, I have used the descriptive analysis to allow the reflective and symbolic analysis to evolve. In addition, all my commentaries and reflections have played the role of contextualizing each single image and its representation. I have intentionally employed a methodological procedure of linking the individual analysis of each visual unit with both the other visual units and with the whole reality to which they are a part of. In regard to the descriptive analysis, I have based my commentaries on theories of perceptual and aesthetic critic analysis, and simple observation. Within this methodological approach, I have developed, through association and induction, a set of reflections in which both affirmations and questions have guided and mediated the final conclusions of my investigation.

For the analysis of my written data, I have used a dialogical methodology. Through a two written voices dialogue --the voice present in my journal, and the voice of my current reflection-- I have drawn a "map" of the territory of Spiral Garden. In this map, the topography of place, action, and myself are integrated within a constructed body of affirmations and questions. In addition, I have intentionally linked the voice of my new reflections to the base of information already created by my reflections on the visual data.

## ( V ) ACTIVITIES IN SPIRAL GARDEN

### Content of Activities

With regard to the content, the majority of the activities are based on crafts or art making (visual, verbal, musical, and corporeal), but children may also enjoy simple recreational activities such as playing with sand and water in a specific area of the garden. Other alternative activities for the children included painting their faces, and wearing costumes from the Costumes Cart. This action often prompted improvised dramatizations, or, simply, their own character while doing other activities. Gardening is a daily activity during the intense, hot summer months. This activity is carried on by the gardener, who proposes to the children the main tasks that should be done on each particular day, and in relationship to some creative/aesthetic projects that she and the children could do with the natural materials of the garden. Gardening, like all the other proposed activities in the garden, represents a free choice for the children. Earth, compost, seeds, plants, flowers, barks..., are some of the basic natural elements with which children may experience their interconnection with the environment. Planting, earth-oxygenating, watering, installing (supportive and/or protective structures), and transporting are some of the activities that gardening offers to children. In any case, gardening is only one option among a minimum of ten activities/workshops that are offered to the children daily in the garden.

### Timetable

The timetable of activities is well structured. At approximately 8:15 a.m., the day begins with the gathering of the staff forming a circle around the spiral of earth and grass that is in the center of the garden. In silence, each member follows a set of stretching body

movements performed within an individual pace. These movements are thought "to ground themselves [the staff] in the space and with each other" (S.G. publicity brochure, 2000). Though facilitators and volunteers are not required to participate in these exercises, they are encouraged by the staff to join this early morning activity. At the end of this practice, one of the staff members announces the day's activities and asks the volunteers to choose the tasks they want to participate in. The staff also has the right to suggest or even to assign, if necessary, a specific role to the volunteer.

Around 9:00 a.m., parents and children arrive at the garden and socialize with the staff and other members of the community. The staff begins to set up the different canopies, tables, and art materials. This is also the time in which facilitators and volunteers are required to arrive at the site and to join the staff. During this time the children have the opportunity to meet with their peers and make visual/sensory contact with all the different elements in the garden.

At 9:30 a.m. everybody is called by the conch, a white shell used as a sonorous instrument, to come together to the morning music circle. In the music circle, a group of animators (usually a singer, a guitarist, and two percussionists), invite both children and adults to play percussion instruments and sing songs. In this context the music is used to unify people, and it has a spirit of festive celebration. Before breaking up the circle, each member of the staff presents to the children the activities which he/she is offering them during the day. The children are free to choose whatever is more appealing to them. The morning circle is also the time in which a story or cross-activity (parade or procession) is introduced.

Lunch takes place between noon and 1:00 p.m. Once they have finished eating, children may also go to the playground or the field. While eating, they may choose to listen to tales and stories told by an adult on the grass, or sit in the *tipi*, a small intimate space in which they can tell true personal life stories or dreams. In the latter, an adult quickly writes down in a notebook a few lines from each of the stories/dreams to create a final collective story. Adults, which include the staff, facilitators, and volunteers, are divided into two groups with two different schedules for lunch. While one group is attending to the children, the other is free to eat in the cafeteria or in the garden. The adults' lunch period is thirty-five minutes.

The afternoon music circle, which takes place at 1:00 p.m., is similar to the morning music circle. Although now it is unnecessary to explain the day's activities, so a special event or story may be introduced.

At 3:00 p.m. the day's activities conclude with cleaning up. Before leaving the garden, all the adults come together in two different groups to share and interchange their personal experiences of the day. One of the groups is formed by the volunteers, the facilitators and the volunteer coordinator who serves as a link between volunteers and staff. The other group is formed by the staff.

The change of activities is always announced in the garden by the sound of the conch. When the children and the adults hear its sound, they know it is time to come together to form a circle or time for the children to leave the garden at the end of the day.

## My Role in Spiral Garden

During the month of July of 2000, I worked as a volunteer three days per week in Spiral Garden. As a volunteer, I was required to spend approximately seven hours per day in the setting. I learnt that working in Spiral Garden as a volunteer did not mean to play a pre-established, fixed role. My role was defined by the specific necessities of the children and the staff and also by my personal interests and capacity to adapt. In any case, this interactive-self-directed role occurred within a well defined hierarchical frame of responsibilities and rights that was introduced at the very beginning of the program by the staff. Within this frame, volunteers and *facilitators* (the ones who are hired to give a full time attention to the child who suffers more severe disabilities) were always required to adapt to the general and good development of the courses (the staff being the ones who had, ultimately, the responsibility/right to decide what the volunteer's obligations were in specific or problematic situations). Apart from this referential frame of authority whose objective was to provide the necessary limits in a context in which the children's physical and emotional safety was the main concern, volunteers enjoyed extensive freedom. This freedom was exemplified by not being given a pre-established role in the large range of artistic/creative options offered by the program.

Overall, the activities in the garden were governed by a co-operative, team approach in which individual differences were allowed and even encouraged to be expressed if they were not in contradiction with the creation/preservation of a safe environment for the children and the community. One of the ways in which I interpreted and conducted this combination of freedom and responsibility associated with my role, was by exposing and choosing clearly my preferences with regard to the different artistic

activities, and at the same time by asking the staff, from time to time, if they needed me more in another spot. This wish and flexibility, clearly expressed since the beginning of my participation in the program, to adapt myself to different creative contexts, meant both an opportunity and a challenge for developing a variety of roles. During the total period of my participation as a volunteer, I played a role in five different workshops: painting, wood making, puppetry, jewellery, and candle making. In the painting, wood making, and puppetry workshops I played the role of being a helper to the staff. In the jewellery and candle making, however, I was the one who was responsible for the general development of the art/craft making. Previous to the latter workshops, a staff introduced me to the procedure and materials of each activity. Considering that three of the five activities in which I played a role, puppetry, jewellery, and candle making were completely new to me, my participation in this program meant that I too got to discover and learn.

To summarize, I experienced the role of volunteer in the Spiral Garden program as a challenging but highly creative invitation to be flexible and open to the ongoing situation. To be present and intuitive within the immediate context in which I was involved in each and every moment and, simultaneously, within the whole environment of the garden became an essential principle of my experience.

# ( VI ) REFLECTIONS

## Reflections on the Visual Data

### Part I -- Artefacts in the garden

In a central area of the garden, a three metre tall sculpture stands on the grass. With structural simplicity, four cylindrical bars of bamboo cane form a square in the mass of air. In the centre of this square, a *mandala* or circle made of assembled painted pieces of wood is attached to the cane structure by metallic thread. This circular organization consists of eight pieces which are linked by wooden radials to a ninth central

**Figure 1**

piece. Some of these peripheral pieces of wood represent objects such as a flower, a star, a fish, or the moon. The total composition formed by all of them seems to evoke the cardinal points: North, South, East, West --the perpendicular cross; Northwest, Southeast, Northeast, Southwest --the diagonal cross. Globally, this artefact integrates the static presence that emanates from the closed shape of the square with the perceptual dynamism of the radial structure of the *mandala*. In addition to this contrast of stability and dynamism, what is also highlighted is the well-planned construction and structural consistency of the total piece on one hand, and the spontaneity and "naive", childlike print that is embodied in the procedure and visual vocabulary of the central radial composition on the other.

**Figure 2**

From a dried tree trunk or branch which is supported by a circular base, different painted wooden artefacts are projected out into the air in all directions. Each of these objects seems to emulate the organic way in which the branches of a real tree grow out into the space. They emerge from a central serpent-like axis, and represent objects such as the keyboard of a piano, an aircraft, a bird, a house-temple with a star hanging from its roof... Overall, a poetic, surrealist universe in which each piece "tells" a story of the whole story that is encrypted in the art object. Similarly to the artefact represented in Figure 1, we may perceive here a well integrated contrast between the structural consistency of the total piece (although within a much more dynamic and all-rounded spatial composition in this case) and the spontaneity, fragility, and innocence that is present in each of the individual crafts of the artefact. In addition, the ensemble of potentially autonomous artistic objects that is present in these two artefacts (Figure 1 and 2) strongly suggest that they are both the result of a team-made artwork.

**Figure 3**

Figure 4 represents a closer view of the same artefact that is represented in Figure 3, and t shows with more detail the richness of its iconography. Within the two big wood pieces whose shapes resemble the outstretched wings of a bird, the combination of patterns, symbols, figurative representations, stains, and strokes, creates an eclectic plastic expression marked by spontaneity. Both the painting and the wood making procedures which are present in this artefact seem to be the result of a collaborative work. What's the story that all these artefacts are telling and hiding from us? Why and how were they created?

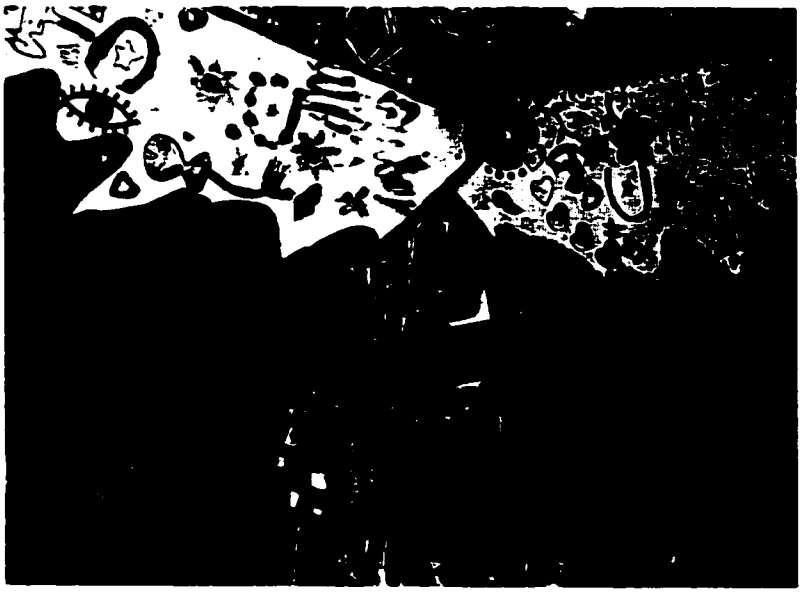

**Figure 4**

In contrast with the artefacts shown in Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4, the wood making object that we see here is the creative result of an artistic project carried out by an individual instead of a group. It was created by a child in the wood making workshop while I was volunteering in the garden. There is no trace of eclecticism in this art object but rather a strong unity of style. It is not one of the "permanent" and apparently collective

**Figure 5**

artefacts made in/for the garden (such as the ones shown in Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4), but an individual artwork which most of the children like to take with them to their homes when the program is finished. The rationale associated with this process is, therefore, different from the one used for the construction of the artefacts shown in the precedent pages.

**Figure 6**

Figures 6 and 7 show the intimate and fragile kind of art that children and adults may also discover and experience in Spiral Garden. As we can see in Figure 6, a web made with thin tree branches and clay beads creates an embracing atmosphere of lights and shadows which surrounds a small, organic-shaped table. On the table (Figure 7), we see a collection of natural and crafty objects such as a bird nest with a white stone in its centre, remnants of a beehive, and a craft made with waved natural fibbers. The craft is suggestive of a spider web and was introduced in a workshop by the leader as a "sun wheel". How did all these things come to this corner of the garden, and who brought them here?

**Figure 7**

**Figure 8**

A mobile created by a selection of painted plywood pieces hangs from tree branches. What's its story? Each plywood piece of this mobile was painted by a child in the painting workshop in which I worked at the time. Days later, the staff selected some of these painted pieces, and using string, mounted the mobile from a dry branch. In a ritual performance initiated by some children and staff, and animated by musicians, the mobile was lifted and incorporated into the green canopy above in the presence of everyone in the garden.

## Commentary

The kind of artefacts that we encounter in Spiral Garden can be grouped in different categories which derive from the recognition of the different qualitative and/or functional aspects that they embody. A first distinction that the visitor may perceive among the total sum of artefacts that "inhabit" the garden is their size with regard to the relational proportion found in both the natural environment-- bushes and trees as vertical masses, earth and grass as horizontal extensions-- and the human body. In this regard, the artefacts may be categorized as "big" and "small". The "big" ones are artistic objects which may be perceived within a panoramic view (Figures 1, 2, and 3) and they are usually also part of what can be called the "permanent" artefacts. These permanent artefacts were never removed from the garden during the period of time I worked there. From an emotional and psychological point of view, I envision them as the "totem-guards" of Spiral Garden; they are exposed to weather conditions and they embody the aesthetic-cultural identity of the garden and its people. By contrast, the "small" artefacts (Figures 6 and 7) can only be perceived by the visitor by exploring and wandering in the garden, which implies an exercise of spatial selection and the practice of a "zoom watching". Many of these "small" artefacts are removed from the place they occupy in the garden during the day in order to protect them from the environmental factors of erosion. These "small" artefacts may also be called "ephemeral", in contrast with the "permanent" ones. In addition, I want to highlight that the "big" and "permanent" artefacts (Figures 1, 2 and 3) pre-existed my arrival in the garden. They were created in a time and in relation to aesthetic-behavioral conditions which are unknown to me, and which belong to the chronological and qualitative history of the seventeen-year old program of Spiral Garden.

However, the presence in these "big" and "permanent" artefacts of both a sense of unity and well-planned final composition on one hand, and a collage-pastiche constructive procedure and eclecticism on the other, gives them the appearance of projects made by a team of children and adults. One of the physical characteristics of these artefacts which clearly signals an adult intervention is precisely their physical status as "permanent" or partially resistant to environmental erosion and gravity. It is obvious that in order to obtain this status, the final product or artefact had to undergo some very well-planned procedures, such as the one of creating or finding a tubular, metallic structure (see Figure 3) to provide a strong and secure base for the vertical, aerial nature of these objects. As mentioned before the objects that were created during my stay in the garden (Figure 8) are the result of bringing together some of the artworks made by individual children through a process of adult intervention and child/adult collaboration. In addition, the comparison between some of these artefacts (compare the artefacts represented by Figures 1 and 5) reveals that different aesthetic rationales have been practised while they were created.

Globally, the majority of these artefacts portray stories related to the Spiral Garden community and to the history of the place. With their presence, they offer a testimony of a dialogue between, children, adults, and nature; an open dialogue to be continued by the community's new members and visitors.

**Reflections on the Visual Data**

**Part II – Art making in the garden**

Coming into the garden after a weekend, we found that a summer storm caused some "modifications" in the landscape. An enormous willow tree placed in the north west area of the garden had been split by lightning. Figure 9 shows the moment in which the gardener of Spiral Garden introduces the children to some of the activities that she thought, while exercising an attitude of spontaneity and flexibility toward this

**Figure 9**

unexpected situation, could be done with the smaller willow branches. Wearing a willow-branch crown on her head, she is proposing to the children to create their own corporeal ornaments with the flexible branches, and to plant some of them also in specific areas of the garden.

**Figure 10**

Here we see a child and the gardener engaged in the process of planting in an area of the garden in which, simultaneously, other children and staff were creating a puppet house. With the planting of these branches, the Spiral Garden participants were giving continuity to the "environmental design" that has been practised in the Spring-Summer-Fall cycles of the last seventeen years.

**Figure 11**

In the morning circle, some staff are inviting the children to see the puppet-characters and "talk" or play with them and "through" them. These puppet-characters are already familiar for some of the children since they might have played with them on past years or might even have participated in their creation. For some other these puppet-characters are something new to discover. In Figure 12 we see a child who, after getting involved with one of the puppets, decided to tell a story for us.

**Figure 12**

**Figure 13**

In Figure 13 we can see how the circular structure of the work tables used in the garden helps to integrate the individual work of the children into a social and communicative activity. Certainly, the physical proximity of each artwork on the table gives the appearance of a collective "wheel-mural". Art materials such as acrylic paintings and brushes are piled up in the centre of the table, and the participants are free to choose from the tools that are available. In Figure 14, a child with disabilities shows us her artwork while the others seem to be engaged in the contemplation of their still fresh paintings.

**Figure 14**

Figure 15 shows the clay workshop in which children, staff, volunteers, and facilitators work together. As we can see, the atmosphere is very relaxed and communicative. Although the principal role of the staff, facilitators, and volunteers is to facilitate, assist, and encourage the children in their activities they are also allowed to get involved with the art materials whenever the children are satisfactorily engaged with the

**Figure 15**

art making. On the left side of Figure 15, we can observe how a facilitator (a person hired to give full-time assistance to a child who usually suffers from severe disabilities) is using her own hands to help a child with disabilities. It shows how working with children with special needs often requires the physical, emotional and intellectual participation of the adult within the child's art process.

In Figure 16, we see a child looking from the other side of a metallic fence and through a colourful webbed oval shape, while, at the same time two tiny, fragile hands are webbing on this side of the fence. The oval shape is being made by two children with disabilities and two volunteers including myself. Before starting to web, we had to create long portions of linked stripes with patches of different fabrics. This art project was first suggested and later proposed to the staff by myself, and they encouraged me to initiate it as one more activity, although it was not previously part of the program. This project emerged, therefore, as a spontaneous reaction to the environment, and in rela-

**Figure 16**

tionship with a bigger art project: the construction of a puppet house. I envisioned the design of this oval shape as a metaphoric "eye-window" from where the puppets and all the Spiral Garden participants could see and connect with the "wild" and "mysterious" world of the ravine's forest. Symbolically, it linked the inside and the outside of the garden and it was also a way to embellish both the north wing of the garden and the puppets' house.

**Figure 17**

In Figure 17 we can appreciate the spatial interconnection that exists in the activities of Spiral Garden. The garden is an open space in which the children may have easy access to the different workshops and areas of play. The aerial structure that crosses the whole scene is a transportation water system made with bamboo cane and supported by narrow tree trunks. The function of this aqueduct is to transfer water from the hospital building to the sand playground. This is one of the installation-artefacts that have to be removed and reinstalled every day. This image informs also about the way in which all the garden's installations and forniture have been mainly adapted to the condition and necessities of the children with disabilities (observe the very low height of the painting table and the portions of dried tree trunks which are offered as alternatives chairs to both the children without disabilities and the adults).

**Figure 18**

Figure 18 shows a group of children who are engaged in the activity of kneading bread. This activity indicates that the "big" festival-celebration with which each two-week summer program culminates is going to occur at the end of the day. In this celebration, bread, cookies, or other culinary goods are shared with the garden's people while different performing activities are taking place.

**Figure 19**

Two children hold large puppets in their hands during the rehearsal for the play that they will later perform during the closing festival-celebration. The three staff members who are with them play the role not only of animators and helpers, but also of performers (notice the character in black with a white painted face at the bottom and left side of the scene).

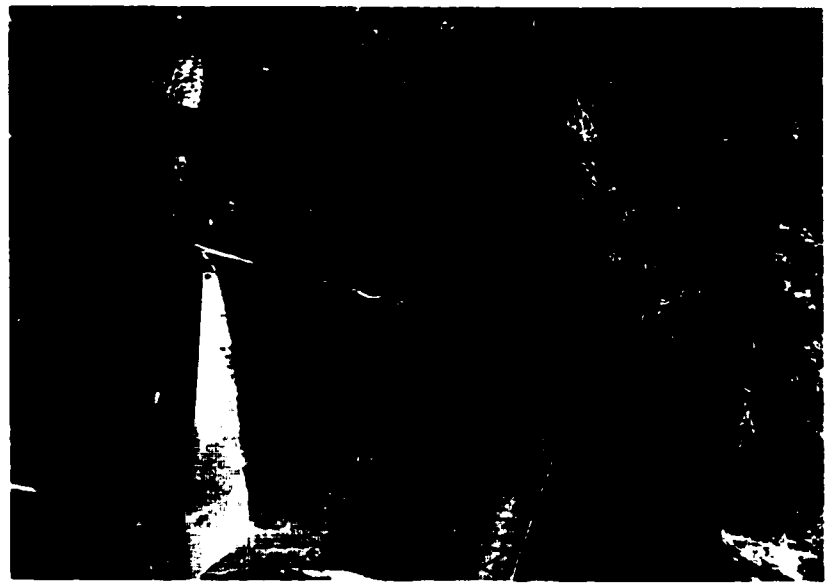

**Figure 20**

In Figure 20 we see the stage from the public's viewpoint. The central piece of fabric than hangs from a string which has been stretched between two tree trunks was painted by the children during the program. It was created with the special purpose of providing the decoration of a scene in the final performance.

**Figure 21**

In Figure 21, we are already into the "big" festival-celebration. Children who might have played a role in the happening are now quietly watching the others while sitting down on the blue carpets that are spread on the grass. The child who sits in the foreground is wearing a costume made by painted carton and fabric ribbons which represent a butterfly. All children's costumes were made during the painting workshop by the children and the leader of the workshop. At the bottom we see an enormous puppet, *Zucchini Queen*, who is held and animated from the interior hidden part of its dress by a member of Spiral Garden --a woman on a wheel chair who years ago came to the garden as a child and now works as a collaborator.

**Figure 22**

Figure 22 shows a typical scene of the final festival-celebration in which a staff, an actor and musician, is acting and playing with a puppet in the centre of the circle created by both performers and espectators, children and adults. This image clearly shows the high degree of adult's participation that exists in the Spiral Garden activities program. It also talks of the familiar way in which both plannification and spontaneity coexist in this community.

## Commentary

Similarly to the natural open space that defines Spiral Garden, its program is also open to the potentiality and unexpected aspects of each present situation. As these visual documents elucidate, much of the creative activities of this community are directly involved with its physical environment. On some occasions, the staff propose the use of natural materials to create an ephemeral art that is related to the embellishment of the people and the space (Figure 9); on some others, they invite the children to participate in the physical transformation/construction of the environment through the practice --or should I say art?-- of gardening (Figure 10). Although there is not any imposition on children about the creative/artistic subject matter or medium, the staff continuously unfold a broad range of contexts and materials which have the potential of awakening in each individual child the wish to interact with the environment (Figures 11 and 12). In addition, traditional separations and hierarchies among art languages (such as visual, verbal, musical, or corporeal) and crafts do not operate in this context.

In regard to the qualitative aspects of the human interaction that take place in this setting, Figures 12 and 14 show the strong emphasis that Spiral Garden's staff put on the aspects of socialization and communication through the art making. Certainly, the use of rounded tables for the different workshops instead of individual tables, facilitate the integration of the total sum of the individual creative discoveries into a collective, non competitive experience. Figure 14 shows also the highly differentiated and individualized way in which each adult (playing his/her specific role as a staff, volunteer, or facilitator) gives support or interacts with each individual child, and more specially with the child with disabilities. In this sense, the adult in Spiral Garden is not an inhibited, passive observer

but a member more of the community who, through action and dialogue, share his/her own creativity with the children and the other adults.

As we can see in Figure 17, the open and connected spatial distribution of the different art making and playing areas of the garden allow to children to relate themselves spatially with the environment with a much higher level of autonomy and freedom than the usually available one in the art classroom. I also want to remark how in the environmental design approach of Spiral Garden functionality and aesthetic concerns are integrated in the didactic and recreational furniture and installations of the setting. By constructing an aerial water path of cane (Figure 17), for example, instead of simply transporting the water through a plain tube of rubber, the Spiral Garden's staff placed themselves as practitioners of an "eco-art" alternative, a recent art practice in which the use of natural materials and/or the deep engagement between the aesthetic meaning and function of the artwork within the natural environment are essential.

Finally, in the Spiral Garden's program different practices and art languages, such as kneading and baking bread, children's story telling, stage-decoration painting, and costumes making are integrated in the art languages of the performance and happening within a central spirit of celebration.

## Reflections on the Written Data

In this section, I have selected passages from my diary that focus on two basic themes: **Environment** and **Celebration** in Spiral Garden. What do I mean by these two words?

- **Environment** refers to the dynamic context in which both the human/non human and the cultural/natural dimensions are understood as interactive and interdependent principles of an evolving reality. Within this approach:
  1. the garden is the embracing space-container for the artwork and the art making;
  2. simultaneously, the garden is not a neutral or objective space but the result of the physical, psychological, cultural, and social construction of the adults, the children, and their interactions with(in) this environment.
- **Celebration** refers to the social and cultural activity that facilitates, through the use of rituals and performing arts the integration of all the different arts and crafts into a meaningful event by and for the community.

However, in terms of analysis, I have organized my reflections around three components:

- Aesthetic experience.
- Educational perspective and methodology.
- Ritual and performing arts.

### Aesthetic Experience

To begin with, let's relive the visual and spatial impact that I felt when visiting the garden in a brief solitary period of time in which the garden had been recently vacated by a

group of schoolchildren and was being readied by the staff for the coming summer program:

> **Finally, the garden! My focus is immediately directed towards a spiral path shaped by grass. This spiral occupies a central position within the garden. Coming closer to it, I realize that the whole garden is illustrated and spatially organized by different groups of wood artefacts which, without doubt, have the print of children's spontaneity and fantasy. These colourful objects are placed between various trees, or hanging down from the tree branches, and I feel as if they were both revealing and hiding secret stories.**

These words report the integration that exists in Spiral Garden between the natural primordial space of the earth and human creative intervention. By giving physicality to the abstract verbal identity of the setting through designing a spiral with the materials provided by the natural world --earth and grass-- the Spiral Garden staff make explicit their eco-aesthetic philosophical approach. It was from this organic and geometrical spatial statement, the spiral presiding and unifying the whole territory of the setting, that I perceived the scenery created by the "big" and "permanent" artefacts, the "totem-guards" of the garden. Since this initial moment, I felt the "enchantment" of being surrounded by art objects which, with paradoxical equality, were revealing as much as hiding the stories of the place for me. While immersed in this vegetative, bio-artefact web of sensorial stimuli, an improvised spatial exploration drove me towards an aesthetic experience which was provoked by one of the many "small" artefacts of the garden:

> **During my walk, I discover something that invites me to stop. It is a piece of dried clay, and I feel captivated by the way the wind interacts with and modifies**

**its static nature. The clay represents a human face and hangs from a tree branch from some fishing line. With the wind, it continuously rotates like a Sufi dancer or a planet close to the sun. Its vertiginous movement offers me a dynamic reflection of the light, the same light that caresses my face and naked arms.**

This clearly reflects how the natural world has the power of shaping and co-creating an aesthetic experience. Certainly, it was the wind, a natural element, that interacted with and modified my aesthetic perception of an otherwise motionless art object: a piece of clay. The light too, not only as a visual phenomenon but as a body-sensorial experience offered by the sun, charged my perception with both existential depth and sensuality. The clay, and the wind, and the light..., and my awareness, reflection, memory, and imagination became irreplaceable aspects of the whole aesthetic experience.

In addition, other small and extremely simple (art?) objects caught my attention during my exploration:

**Getting closer to the different expressive and/or functional groups of artefacts, I observe here and there circles of wood with similar characteristics. These circles reveal on their upper surfaces a sort of collage created by a combination of different grains and seeds.**

Due to the formal simplicity and formal similarity of these objects, I started to question myself about their meaning and functionality:

**I wonder if the construction of these decorated circles responds only to an aesthetic need, or if, maybe, they have been created to feed the birds and other animals in the surroundings... If the latter is the case, what kind of glue are they using to secure the grains and seeds to the wood? (...) Before leaving the garden,**

**R. comes and asks me, --Do you have some questions? --Oh!, yes, by the way..., what are these decorated circles? Have they been created to feed the animals? --Yes, the grains have been glued with a non toxic gun. All the grains will be gone tomorrow for the animals will eat them. Actually, by offering and providing food to the animals we prevent them from spoiling or eating some areas of the garden.**

Although these "slices" of wood covered with organic, edible material were not the most spectacular artefacts in the garden, they constitute, however, a genuine example of the kind of experiences and interactions that both children and adults may have in this setting. These humble pieces exemplify, also, the enormous variability of functional-aesthetic relationships that may potentially exist within a culture or subculture. To be sure, I recognize in these collages (made with nutritional and ephemeral elements instead of plastic materials) a sign of ecological concern; a wish of re-establishing an almost broken dialogue between art, culture, and nature within today's high-tech, anthropocentric-oriented cultural context. In addition, the selection and inclusion of this "eco-plastic" procedure made by the staff reveals the great amount of thought and planning that the adults of this setting dedicate to an only-half-way improvised children's art program.

Educational Perspective and Methodology

Besides the purely physical context of Spiral Garden, a whole set of beliefs and behavioural attitudes sustained by the adults of this community defines the type of human experience and interaction that takes place within it. In a personal effort to perceive from

an art educational perspective the relationship between educational purposes (if they existed as such) and the behavioural practices of this setting, I wrote down in my journal the following impressions and reflections:

> **I am starting to perceive what may be a lack in this self-directed and child-centered pedagogical context --the lack of time for individual and collective reflection and digestion of the creative process. For example, until now I have not seen the inclusion of observation and feeling of the natural world of the garden through the senses. Although gardening is one of the elective daily activities of the program, it still does not provide a general focus and attention on activities such as observing-feeling the trunks of the trees (their texture and/or colour), or the movement of their leaves when moved by the wind. (...) Why not pay attention to the exterior world and try to link it with the subjective, individual world through the art making?**

In order to elucidate some points, I think it may be interesting to link these journal statements with new questions. Is it true that there is no room for observation or perceptive feeling in the art program of Spiral Garden? Sensorial perception and observation having an integral role in all creative artistic processes, it is impossible to state that they are not lively components of the children's artistic experiences in Spiral Garden. What can be said, however, is that in contrast with the strong emphasis that exists in this program in facilitating a varied range of art making procedures for the children, other aspects of the creative process such as perception and observation of the environment are not sufficiently emphasized. Is this the consequence of a conscious educational purpose? Could it derive, perhaps, from an assumed pseudo-Lowenfeldian child-centered

methodology, or does it derive from the difficulties of working with such a heterogeneous group of children? Given the impossibility of answering these questions in the frame of my research, I nevertheless want to highlight that in the methodological approach of Spiral Garden there is an obvious intention of favouring a subjective, social, and environmental dialogue from within the child's world towards the exterior world, but not an obvious dialogical procedure in which the information from the exterior world is channelled, through the art making, towards the interior, subjective world of the child. From my perspective as an art educator, to put methodological emphasis in the children's sensorial experience and to invite them to report on it with both verbal and visual language, is an excellent way of reinforcing the communicative functionality of the art making. In addition, the means of drawing and mapping, may potentially awaken a rich dialogue between the object described and the subject, the child. For this activity to evolve, observation, sensorial feelings and conceptual organization are required. However, I want to remark that for this dialogue between the object and the subject to take place, observing and drawing must not be identified with "copying" but with interpretation. Also, the programming of art practices in which the reaction to and the interpretation of the environment are included as a part of the whole creative process may potentially balance children's sometimes compulsive doing through art making. I refer to "compulsive doing" as a way of behaving in which it is just the action and not its qualitative-creative potentialities what is explored by the child. It is the teacher's responsibility, I think, to design specific educational strategies and contexts in which the child will "naturally" explore such qualitative aspects and potentialities inherent to the action.

The strong emphasis on "action" that I perceived during my stay in the Spiral Garden community is related as follows:

> **... When children do not suffer from physical and/or mental disabilities they are too busy in choosing various "enjoyable" experiences. It seems that the emphasis is –too strongly perhaps?– on action. Doing, moving, and playing seems to be the core belief in this community of adults and children. Fine! There is nothing wrong with that but..., at some point, why not spend some time looking at and talking about what each child in particular is finding, feeling, interpreting, and in the presence of the other children? What methodology will then allow this to happen? Creating small groups, maybe? Creating performances in which each child will show the others his/her work? For me, the objective would be: time to see, time to absorb, after and in between, the creative-impulsive actions.**

As the above passage reflects, I was missing "something" in the general pattern of behaviour derived from the art making methodology of Spiral Garden. This "something" was, as I see it now, the inclusion of reflective practices within the art processes in order to allow the child to better absorb and digest the creative experience. This inclusion will imply, I think, a greater assimilation of both the reality in its previous, autonomous state with regard to the art procedure and the new reality embodied by the created art objects. Although this reflective process happened spontaneously in the socio-educational context of Spiral Garden due to the highly personalized inter-subjective dialogue that occurred between adult and child (and among the children themselves), it was not explicitly defined as a collective social-aesthetic procedure in its art methodology. In my view, to invite the children to explore the environment through all the senses, observation and contemplation,

and report their personal experiences verbally and graphically to the other members of the community may be a splendid methodological tool to facilitate reflective experiences in children's art processes. Additionally, these reflective practices may increase children's awareness of their environment. The crucial question, however, that I must pose here in order to continue my reflections is the same question that I wrote in my journal during my stay in the garden:

> **Is this possible when working with a group of children like the regular ones in the Summer programs of the McMillan Centre? Obviously, one of the challenges of this educational context is, as I am experiencing, the teachers' necessity of keeping a dialogue with a mixed and highly complex group of children.**

Without doubt, to plan an art program for both children with and without disabilities, and within such a broad range of ages (5-12), adds complexity to the already challenging pedagogical process of designing a specific sequence of activities in which the individual children's differences are accounted. From this perspective, my first reflective reaction is to postulate that in a human context such as the one I encountered in Spiral garden the most open and self-directed art program is the best one to allow all the different children to find their own way of expression and communication through the art making processes. However, reflecting on an experience that I had while assisting a nine-year old child with disabilities invites me to question this quick assumption; an assumption with which, indirectly, I am giving support to the conception that the "hands-on" procedures are the most accessible for all type of children. This experience is reported in the following passage:

**When the painting is finished and unfolded, I hang it on a metallic fence of the garden to let it dry. From the distance we contemplate all the other "fabric paper" paintings. (...) I am thrilled by the warm beauty of the results... E. is absolutely right, these paintings bring to mind African patterns and fabrics.**

What I find revealing in this episode, is that when the context of contemplation was created, first, by my hanging the paintings on the fence, and second, by inviting E. to watch this and other similar paintings from a distance, this nine-year old child with motor disorders and on a wheel-chair spontaneously made a clear and sophisticated aesthetic statement. Part of this sophistication comes from the fact that he, being Canadian-born, recognized (aesthetic perception) and affirmed (aesthetic statement) in these art objects the presence of a very specific cultural-aesthetic identity that was strikingly different from his own cultural tradition.

The reflection on this reading, then, led me to question if the methodological exclusion of practising and developing children's aesthetic criteria or interpretation (as a part of the reflective practices), is based on a real methodological incompatibility when working with children with disabilities or on some vague and generalized educational prejudices. One of these general prejudices in the art educational field is, I think, that the processes which imply more reflection and analysis, which are also associated with "intellectual" processes, preclude the "real" creativity of the artistic experience, the one which is present in the art making. These reflections reveal two emergent research themes in my investigation:

1. Why are these reflective experiences methodologically excluded from the mixed-group children's art program of Spiral Garden?

2. What is the methodological compatibility or incompatibility of using these reflective practises (sensorial exploration, reporting --graphically and verbally--, contemplating, and aesthetic interpretation) in a socio-educational art program for children with disabilities?

Two factors make it difficult to answer these question. One is that the exclusion of reflective practices is very common in official, institutional and private art curricula and art programs which have been designed for the average child. Another one is the limited amount of research that has been developed in regard to the art teaching/learning practices for children with disabilities inside the art education context. Could this scant research development be due to the current dichotomy held by the majority of our society, and consequently by the art education institution, between "normal" and "exceptional", between art education and art therapy? Does this imply, consciously or unconsciously, a social and educational discrimination of the child with disabilities?

Linking these questions to the complexity of designing an art program that could best adapt to the specific necessities and capabilities of a very high varied group of children, I want to make more explicit what emerged in my journal as an intersecting theme:

**Working and communicating with both children with special needs and children those "without", makes indispensable the intertwining and overlapping of different educational approaches. By what measure does this necessity limit and/or enrich the educational methodology of this particular context?**

First, I think it is important to reflect on how these "two different educational approaches" may be interpreted and educationally labelled. This interpretation and "labelling" will

depend, ultimately, on our life and art/art teaching philosophies. Within an art teaching conception in which the study of art as a discipline is the main educational purpose, and individual differences or psychological aspects of the learners are not considered of key importance, these two educational approaches will most probably be classified as "authentically educational" one and as "therapeutic" the other. However, if we consider this intersecting theme from the perspective of a totally individualized learner-centered approach, we may find that these "two different educational approaches" are just different segments of a single socio-educational continuum. Therefore, the way in which we may refer to both the child-with and the child-without disabilities in art educational approaches will be based on a whole interdependent system of meanings. To be sure, the way in which we interpret and conceptualize each of these terms, "education", "normality/abnormality", "therapy", and "art", will allow the construction of an interdependent system of meanings which will ultimately define and influence our concrete practises. Once we are aware of the implications of approaching this intersecting theme from one perspective or another, we may more consciously choose our personal position from which to elucidate the question.

The above analysis leads us to consider the advantages and/or disadvantages of designing and practising an art program for both children with and without disabilities. In this context, let us unpack the implicit educational methodology of Spiral Garden from the perspective of the staff who run the program:

**At the "fabric paper" table, we meet S. who is responsible for the workshop. She looks happy to receive us. Soon, I realize that S. is an excellent communicator and an expert in working with children with special needs. She has (or has**

**developed) an extraordinary capacity to transform what could easily be experienced, by the child and herself, as a frustrating process into an alive and exciting experience. She emphasizes each single decision that E. can make during the process. Talking with a warm and gentle, melodic voice, she focuses on verbalizing clearly the step-by-step procedure.**

In the above passage, what is highlighted is the strong emphasis that exists in the applied methodology of this setting in communication which adapts to the specific child's needs and capacities. Within a very individualized adult/child relationship, the teacher or assistant conducts the child's creative process through an empathic dialogue:

**S. invites E. to hand iron the paper repeatedly during the process of folding it (although they do it together, and she also includes me to assist him). --Would you like to fold the paper using rectangles or triangles?, S. asks him. --Triangles!, he answers.**

What I learnt through observation in this context, is how essential is the adult's openness to each present situation and to the specific child's physical, emotional, mental reality in order to allow him/her experience the creative process. I learnt, therefore, that creativity does not belong to any abstract or autonomous stage of development or potentiality, but to the open, dynamic and partially created context in which the child, the adult, and the environment interact within each other. In this interactive reality, the adult (or teacher) must play the role of perceiving and unfolding --with flexibility, tolerance, and openness-- the range of creative possibilities that exist within the child and in relationship with the concrete art materials and techniques. The objective of this methodological approach is, undoubtedly, to empower the child through the art making process.

To conclude this chain of reflections, I wish to bring attention to some thoughts which were generated in the same context that I have referred to in the above passages:

> **Before leaving the table, I mention to S. that it might be interesting if children could spend more time contemplating their creative results. She listens with interest and an open attitude to my suggestion. She also thinks that this could enhance the process of learning and communication of the children, but she doesn't mention the word "learning". She just says that it could be interesting. This shared reflection with S. leads me to the following silent thought: I am starting to realize that the terms "teaching" and "learning" are taboo in this community. From my position/role of participant observer, I am receiving the implicit message that, within the general philosophy of Spiral Garden, the child learns basically through the process of doing and playing. The words "teaching", "learning" and "education" are implicit --unspoken-- words of the adults' practice. In this context, communication and empathy are, I feel, more important than "education".**

At this point, the very foundation of my identity as a "Concordia art educator" was shaken. If "education" as such does not exist in this setting, to what point is it both honest and viable for me to analyze Spiral Garden from an educational perspective?

Ritual and Performing Arts

Although the use of ritual and performing arts constitutes an integral part of the social-aesthetic methodology of Spiral Garden, I have grouped the written data that refers to these activities separately due precisely to the central role that they play in this

program. Many passages in my diary which describe performing social-art experiences have the quality of ritual. These experiences are usually marked by a respectful silence and concentrated doing/perceiving embodied by the majority of the participants in their dual role as actors and receptors. The following passage refers to my first collective experience with the group of adults in the garden, and it is a good example of how ritual is created and used in Spiral Garden:

**In a few minutes we are called by a special instrument, a white shell which emits a serene and continuous sound, to form --as I observe-- a circle around the spiral path. In silence, R. initiates a series of body movements. All of us start to follow him. Although the movements are simple, I feel they are more than mere stretching. They have a ceremonial air. I find it easy and harmonious to follow these movements at my own pace. Through the process of motion, I feel a peaceful communion with the people around me, the earth, the wind, the trees..., all that is, at this specific moment, both inside and outside of me. Finishing, we holds hands together and we are asked to come closer one to the other to narrow the circle. A staff member and drummer, G., comes into the circle. This is really interesting! Following the drum's rhythm and with crossed arms, we clap our hands with our neighbours' hands. At one point during the clapping, each of us receives a round stone which must continuously pass around the circle. I learn how to do it "gracefully" only after the third round. It is a beautiful and powerful ritual. At the end each of us bows to each other. A smile blossoms on my face, and it expands as I perceive J. who is smiling in front of me; her smile is in both her lips and her eyes.**

This experience refers to a simple daily activity (see "stretching body movements" in the chapter "Activities") in which the qualitative aspects of the ***how*** are decisive agents of definition and transformation of the ***what***. That is, from the perspective of my perception it was the attitude and the way of doing/experiencing the action by the participants (including myself), and as a part of the action itself, that really gave a ritualistic dimension to the whole experience. I perceived this way of acting as an individual-collective respect, identification, absorption within the action (corporeal movements) and a blending of being totally present and at the same time flowing in a concrete time-space. Although this experience cannot be considered as related with the art making methodological approach of Spiral Garden, it is, however, related to the adult/teacher role in the program. About the sense of integration and communion with myself, the others, and the environment that I experienced through the action, can I say that it was a consequence of the inherent functionality of the ritual?

In the next passage, a different collective experience is described. It reflects a festive situation whose main purpose is to bring children and adults together through the transmission, continuity and transformation of a collective repertoire of melodies and rhythms. From an art educational perspective, the use of repetition and imitation in these daily morning music circles as a social-learning procedure, reveals the eclectic methodology that is applied in Spiral garden's program:

**With the sounding of the shell, we are called again to come together, now also with the children. It is the morning music circle (9:30 a.m.), time to celebrate with music the gathering of old and new friends, and the beginning of the day at the garden. The musicians, a percussionist, a guitarist, and a singer, lead "the**

**party". Easy, rhythmical, and funny melodies in which children are asked to participate with instruments, clapping, and word improvisation.**

In contrast with the exclusion of imitation and repetition in the visual art making workshops that other data have revealed, we find here that the combination and repetition of both familiar and new songs are used as a vehicle for unifying all the members of Spiral Garden.

In contrast with the above passage, the description below describes a performing art experience in which the strong unifying social role that characterized all of the performing practices was shaped in this occasion by what I would call the "interior solemnity" of the ritual. The following episode belongs to the same context in which the image portrayed by Figure 8 (see List of Illustrations) was created.

**Finishing the afternoon music circle, an engaging celebration takes place. With ceremonial rhythm, the group of drummers and musicians animate the action of raising up a mobile sculpture. This sculpture has been created with a body of painted plywood pieces, leaves of clay, and bird feathers. It is the result of a selection from the artistic "fruits" of the past days labour which are now hanging from a tree branch. At the same time, we** [everyone who did not participate in the musical parade and raising of the mobile] **are dancing and blowing in all directions to invite the wind of the North, the East, the South, and the West. This is supposed to help us to elevate the mobile. Using two branches of two different trees in the garden as a pulley, D. and M. slowly pull down the two strings that are holding the mobile from the opposite ends of the branch. When finally the mobile is up, we all contemplate the amazing mobility that the wind**

**grants to the hanging objects. The beauty of the mobile is integrated in the beauty of the garden. When the music stops, the mobile still sounds. The wind is "playing" it. The whole garden is an installation.**

This passage reflects how through a performing activity in which I recognize the presence of the ritual, different art media such as music, painting, sculpture, and installation may be integrated within a social and cultural event. Also, by creating a collective artwork in which different individual art objects are integrated within a new whole, and within the garden, the Spiral Garden's staff express what I consider to be the strongest artistic, social and spiritual statement of this community: *Celebration*. To be sure, *Celebration* is both the core principle and the underlying current of the integral philosophy of Spiral Garden.

In the next passage, for example, the performing activity does not play the role of bringing together everyone in the garden. It is one more activity which, however, has the power to influence and "alter" all the other activities. It is also an unexpected invitation for both children and adults to participate in a "collective dream":

**During a "washroom run", I momentarily join a singular procession. A large group of people are following a tall, tall woman (L., the singer of the adult group, is walking on stilts), and I can't help but start dancing. The tall woman and her "troop" are hanging some sculptures that have been created with beads of clay and feathers from the high branches of the trees. This fantastic woman transports me to a world of real fantasy, she is like coming out of a forgotten tale, or, in fact, she must be the princess or queen of a friendly Kingdom outside of Spiral Garden who is visiting us.**

This activity elucidates how in the performing arts, the artwork: the action within the context, includes both the creative process and the final aesthetic experience. In other words, the "producing" and the "consuming" are integrated in a whole present time grounded in a space. This temporal-spatial whole is always a life context in itself.

In addition to the performances and happenings that are a part of the daily methodological approach of Spiral Garden, there are traces in my diary of the cohesive and structural role that the final closing celebration plays in the total experiential continuum of each two-week summer course. These "pre-stages" of celebration are experienced as follows:

> **There is something contagious and special in the air. We all feel, children and adults, that the culmination of "something" is going to occur.**

These words express, indeed, the emotional and psychological intensity of the collective experience in the anticipatory stages of the final celebration. As I experienced it, this final celebration plays a primordial organizing role in the total sequence of activities of each summer course. It is the culmination of a process in which all the individual and collective experiences and art languages are integrated. Within this process, an organized acceleration "pulls" all the different centres and episodes of the environment towards a new centre, the centre of the spiral of celebration:

> **Around our table, everybody is involved in various activities. Making candles, baking bread, preparing the bird-puppets to dance with them at the coming ceremony, applying makeup, dressing in colourful clothing, and playing musical instruments. Sounds, smells, colours, movement, everything in the garden is flowing within a spiral of celebration.**

The impulse of this spiral creates the space and time of "sharing", in which all the members of the Spiral Garden community come together to hear and tell the stories that have been created during the last two weeks. Now is the time to visually feast on the variety of crafts and artworks that have been created while playing, listening to music, dancing and eating. It is the fruit of an internal cycle of renovation within the Spiral Garden community.

# ( VII ) CONCLUSIONS

## Primary and Derivative Principles

To conclude, I think it is essential to present the findings of my research as derivative factors of what it is the primary reality of Spiral garden: an interactive human, cultural, and natural environment. Within this environment, both art languages and art experiences are based on a social foundation of art. This social foundation of art has philosophical precedents in the progressive education movement, which argued that education should first of all be based on direct experience as it refers to the learner. As progressive educators pointed out, if "experience comes about through interaction" then "education is a social process" (John Dewey, 1938, pp. 58-59).

The rehabilitation art program of Spiral Garden started as a human reaction towards a social reality, the indoor hospital confinement and isolation of children with disabilities. As derivative of this fact, art is used in Spiral Garden first of all as a vehicle to reintegrate these children within a natural environment and in the context of a community. The integrity of this community can only be measured by "the degree of expressed care" that its members demonstrate for each other (Peter London, 1994, p. 47). Quite clearly, art is instrumental in Spiral Garden. Its facilitation and use in this setting as a means of communication derives from a clear conviction: "the only way to empower the disempowered is to humanize interaction: to give caring, sharing and supporting pride of place..., and to allow each member of the community their voice" (Helja Antola Robinson, 1994, p. 123). Within this context, learning takes place for everybody, children and adults. Certainly, children are at the centre and origin of Spiral Garden's program. However, adults add directionality to the whole set of interactions that take place in this social

context through working, planning, inventing and playing. This adult intervention is best expressed by Dewey's observation that, "When education is based upon experience and educative experience is seen to be a social process, (...) the teacher loses the position of external boss or dictator but takes on that of leader of group activities" (1938, p. 59). Keeping in mind the core social context from which the art program of Spiral Garden evolves, I want to present its most relevant aspects as interdependent realities of an organic pattern of relationship. **Empowering the child through art making** is the main socio-educational purpose of the Spiral Garden program, from which its specific child-centered approach derives. The specific characteristics of this approach are embodied and reflected in a methodology based on two main praxis:

- Interaction within the environment:
    a. relationship among the children, and between the children and the environment,
    b. relationship between the children and the adults, and
    c. relationship among adults, and between the adults and the environment.
- Use of the arts within the environment.

These two main praxis are interconnected realities of a methodology that simultaneously expresses and develops a function and conceptualization of art. I want to highlight that these function and conceptualization of art derives more of a praxis than a theory though such a praxis should be seen as part of a global philosophy of life within a specific environment.

To summarize, all the relevant aspects of the Spiral Garden art program are organized around three principal components:

1. Interaction within the Environment.

2. Use of the Arts within the Environment.
3. Function and Concept of Art.

With regard to the first component, **interaction within the environment**, my observations reveal that in Spiral Garden:

a. The child is invited by the adult to exercise a self-directed art program through a free choice of art materials and art languages.
b. Children with disabilities are often helped by the adults to carry out their creative, artistic projects.
c. Children and adults participate and interact in collaborative art projects in which the individual dimension of the artwork is integrated within the collective dimension of both the art process and the final aesthetic use of the art object.
d. Most of the adult work, such as assisting the children and planning both the general art program and the performing activities is developed in a collaborative spirit in which different ideas and art languages are integrated in team projects.
e. The adults in this setting are allowed and encouraged to contribute to the general development of the art program through both their professional background and their immediate, spontaneous creative reactions to the environment. In this sense, Spiral Garden's art program is inclusive and open to both innovations and differences which adapt to its main socio-educational purpose. Planning and improvisation coexist as integral aspects of its methodology.

With regard to the second component, **use of the arts within the environment**, my observations reveal that in Spiral Garden:

a. The arts are practised in a multidisciplinary art program in which hierarchical distinctions among different art languages and crafts do not exist.

b. The art program is eclectic in its methodological approach. While the learning procedures of imitation and repetition are absent in the visual art practises, they are present, however, in some of the musical and performing art activities.

c. The visual arts disciplines that are facilitated for the children by the adults, namely painting, wood making and clay, are based on an art making in which the "hands-on" procedures are emphasized.

d. Representational and reflective art experiences such as observation, contemplation, reporting, drawing, mapping and aesthetic interpretation, are not included as explicit methodological procedures of the visual arts practises.

e. The performing arts play an essential role in the total art program; they allow the integration of all the different art languages that are practised in the setting.

With regard to the third component, **function and concept of art**, my observations reveal that in Spiral Garden:

a. Art is used as a means of communication, and all the art activities are designed by the adults to facilitate the child's expression within the context of the group. Therefore, education takes place through socialization and art is one of the specific languages for the social construction of a community.

b. On most occasions, the artefacts produced by and for this community become cultural symbols of its evolving identity. Therefore, art acts as a vehicle for sociocultural identity.

c. Functionality and aesthetic values are inter dynamic aspects of an environmentally related art production.

d. The borders between what are traditionally classified as art languages and other activities such as gardening or playing are not clearly established within the creative interaction that takes place in this setting. Therefore, a broader concept of "art" which implies ambiguity and "resistance" to theoretical definitions or reductions of "art" operates in this context.

e. Some artefacts and installations signal an "eco-plastic" approach in the art making which is derivative of the adults' manifested ecological concern.

f. The educational conception of art-as-discipline in which art history, aesthetics and art criticism play a fundamental role is totally excluded from the methodology.

g. The performing arts are used as agents of social and cultural cohesion.

h. The use of the ritual adds to the mere "action art" a special solemnity and air of religious-mythical communion that transforms the historical "avant-garde" connotations of the performing arts into life functional events.

i. The spirit/spiral of celebration that embraces all the different *actions* confers to these performing arts practises a social and anthropological dimension which goes beyond the mere aesthetic dimension of art.

## Intersecting Theme:

## From a Concept of Healing to an Art Educational Approach

The context of Spiral Garden offered me for the first time the opportunity of being in close contact with children with disabilities. This in itself has been a healing, integrative,

and transformative process for me. It has awakened my consciousness, through a reflective practice, with regard to my identity. I have learned that my identity can only fully evolve through a social integration of what is socially marginalized. Spiral Garden put me in touch with the presence of something which our society and media generally rejects and excludes: "imperfection". From this encounter, I have learnt that individual identity cannot be divorced from social and cultural identity. We are all members of a single social body in which to be different should not result in being excluded. This new dimension of my identity has influenced my current perspective of education and, therefore, of art education. Spiral Garden has been a context in which I have had the opportunity of experiencing art and art teaching as both a subordinate and integrated reality within a broader sociocultural system. To be sure, I have experienced this functional subordination of art and art teaching as a positive thing. The real value of any specialization, I have learnt, is based in its functional contribution to specific contexts within the whole social body. As Dewey (1938) states, "there is no such thing as educational value in the abstract" (p. 46). To this, I would add that there is no art education in isolation. Only within a dialogical context in which social realities and specialized knowledge "talk" with each other, may art find a healthy integration within life and society.

Within this perspective, I approach art teaching for children with disabilities more as a segment of a single art educational continuum than as an isolated practise called "art therapy". Simultaneously, I do not exclude from the general art education field the potentially therapeutic aspects of both art practises and "proper" social contexts for child/student and adult/teacher interactions. Even further, it is only in an interdependent

system in which the different educational specializations integrate their specific educational goals within a social, cultural and natural environment that we may talk of real "therapeutic" processes. Healing and transformation, therefore, do not belong to specific minorities or "art therapists" but to the total human, natural, social and cultural body in which the relationship of interdependency is a necessary requirement to develop a healthy, functional system.

However, to recognize that the art teaching/learning practises specific to children with disabilities are an integral part of an educational continuum does not mean to ignore the real differences that exist between these two groups of children: children with and children without disabilities. If introducing the children with disabilities to the art processes demands from the teacher/facilitator a different and higher individualized attention and dedication than the one that is required when working with those children "without", what then are the advantages and/or disadvantages of designing and practising an art program for both children with and without disabilities?

In the context of an alternative, recreational and short-term program with specific characteristics such as the one offered by Spiral Garden, I see the integration of these two groups of children within an art socio-educational context as very beneficial. By contrast, the integration of these two groups of children within the current official art classroom will imply, I think, more disadvantages than advantages for both the two groups of children and the art teacher.

In Spiral Garden, the art program has been intentionally created and developed by the staff to allow the integration of these two groups of children. The large, interdisciplinary group of adults/facilitators who work within parameters of

interdependency and collaboration in Spiral Garden is not an arbitrary construct. In the standard classroom, however, the art teacher would not teach/facilitate an art program to these mixed group of children as a member of an interdisciplinary team and/or community but rather as an isolated "specialist". For this specialist to design an art curriculum that adapts well to the official curriculum (imposed hierarchically from above as a part of a political-economic-educational system) and to the real capacities/necessities of a very highly differentiated group of children would imply clear disadvantages for all the members involved. Furthermore, children could not receive the individualized attention they require and deserve because a single teacher/facilitator could not possibly handle the enormous task of designing and applying such a complex art program.

I also want to highlight that from a strictly art educational perspective in which the obtaining by the learner of the maximum art contents and technical skills is the central goal of the total program, the integration of these two groups of children, even in the interdisciplinary program of Spiral Garden, would imply some disadvantages for both. In this case, the individual developmental capacities and necessities of neither group would be the starting point from which the sequence of art activities would be designed. Instead, the needs and capacities of both groups would be vaguely included in a general art program so that it could remain open and valid for all children. However, the primary goal of Spiral Garden's program, from which all its secondary interdependent goals derive, is not strictly an art educational one, but a social one. In this program the practise of art is, as stated earlier, subordinated to a social foundation in which the main purpose is to empower the child, and especially the one with disabilities, through the practise of the different arts and in a community context. In my opinion, this instrumentalization of the art

practises in the context of the Spiral Garden program enhances, from a social and human perspective, the total amount of benefits that both groups of children may obtain through art. My evaluation is, therefore, dependent on a whole set of factors such as they exist in a specific context.

In Spiral Garden, for example, the children without disabilities may be compensated for the lack of a very specialized art approach based on specific disciplines with the benefits which derive from a self-directed multidisciplinary art program. In the latter, each child has the opportunity of discovering and developing unsuspected personal artistic skills within the broad range of art languages. In addition, to feel themselves included as members of a varied community through the practice of art may, I think, validate the basic need every child has to belong. The opportunities for guided creative self-direction and for inclusion and belonging which are characteristic of multidisciplinary and community-based art programs are hardly developed within the standard curriculum.

The oppositions and contrasts that exist between the alternative art program created by Spiral Garden and the standard official one with regard to the viability and convenience of designing and applying it for a mixed group of children highlights the following conclusions:

- Alternative education programs are the response to certain social demands that cannot be completely or partially be covered by the official curriculum. In this context, the emergence of community-based art education approaches within the current official settings, reveals an explicit recognition of the tension and interdependency that exists between the social and the educational spheres.

- These alternative programs may potentially reveal new ways of approaching what very often becomes stagnant and falsely "naturalized" behaviour in official art educational contexts. In the alternative art program, the art educator or "specialist" has the opportunity of reflecting about not only how art practises are used in specific alternative contexts, but also in the taken for granted "normal" art curriculum of the institutionalized official setting.

This double perspective from which the specialist and researcher reflect on represents both an opportunity and a challenge for his/her professional development.

## Open Questions and A Hypothesis

As an artist and art educator I have experienced my stay in spiral Garden as an opportunity to experience art and the traditional art disciplines within a genuine and specific socio-natural environment. Simultaneously, this environment has challenged my professional background by inviting me to reflect about general purposes, approaches and methodology from an art education perspective. Through my reflective practice, I have experienced the centrality of purpose. As Lanier (1991) states,

> the essential consideration in any educational policy or practice is its conception of purpose; (...) all other aspects of the enterprise of schooling, such as curriculum, methodology, or evaluation, are logical or inevitable consequences (even when they are unrecognized as such) of the benefits we wish to see our efforts provide for the learners. (p. 13)

In addition, I have learnt that within any art conception and program we may question the total or relative validity of its methodological procedures in relation to both its primary

and secondary purposes. In this sense, I have questioned some of the assumed child-centered methodologies which are applied in Spiral Garden (though not its general child-centered approach).

Within a child-centered approach, certain methodological procedures may have the potential of enhancing one of the implicit purposes of practising art in this setting. The art purpose emphasized by the staff members of Spiral Garden as follows: "Art is the vehicle through which children make connections between the inner world of their imaginations, the natural world and the world of social interaction" (Spiral Garden's unpublished document, 1993). From this perspective, my creative-critical analysis points out that certain procedures could be integrated as a part of the visual creative process in order to enhance children's abilities to make connections. The objective of these procedures would be to expand methodologically the connections between the child's inner world and the environment with the inclusion of the child's external world as a more conscious part of his/her self through art experiences.

To begin with, such procedures would invite the child, through games and suggestions, to explore the environment through the senses to a fuller extent than is experienced now in the Spiral Garden program. With the recognition that "children experience their surroundings directly through play and creative, manipulative behaviour" (Neperud, 1995, p. 238), the creation of a context in which the child could relate and experience the sensorial stimuli of the natural environment as an interconnected source of his/her art processes will imply:

- the child's deeper assimilation of the interconnected aspects which are a part of the creative process, and

- the child's increasing awareness of the environment so that all phenomena are referred to humans, a dialogue between objective and subjective realities.

This invitation to establish more conscious connections between exterior (objective) and interior (subjective) realities should avoid, however, a strong "insistence on the observation of formal qualities" because it "can restrict exploratory tendencies leading to new experiential discoveries" (Neperud, 1995, p. 238).

Within a self-directed approach, then, I propose the spatial and sensorial exploration of the environment as an appropriate methodological art educational strategy for both children with and without disabilities, as far as they may potentially inform/inspire the visual and verbal art experience. In this scenario, visual observation would be one more of the total sum of options that the children could choose from among a multisensorial range of possibilities to "talk" with the exterior world. Once the exterior world has been accepted as a valid and positive means of discovering the self, the child could gain, I defend, an even broader experiential knowledge of the creative process. As a part of this methodological approach in which the child's exterior realities are also a part of his/her subjective creative interpretation, the representational and reflective practises that were introduced in the chapter on "Reflections" would be considered positive creative art procedures to enhance the children's dialogue with the environment through the arts.

My proposal consists, therefore, in amplifying the current "hands-on" emphasis of the visual art program of Spiral Garden through a methodological inclusion in the child's creative process of sensorial exploration and representational/reflective practises. This methodological approach should be considered as valid only within the already methodological limits established by the central purpose of the Spiral Garden program: to

empower the child through the creative process. As far as this purpose remains central to all the art practises, the child-centered approach of this art program will remain intact.

I want to highlight, however, that this proposal is based more in my experiential knowledge as an artist/teacher than in theoretical references. From this perspective, I present my proposal as a hypothesis and not as a theory. A hypothesis that could only be proven educationally valid through an experimental reflective practise and in an interdisciplinary and dialogical context.

## Personal Learning and Implications for Art Education

Finally, I want to point out three significant insights of my experience in Spiral Garden. First, in order to create an educational community-based context, the staff members of Spiral Garden have taught me that the adults/teachers must first create their own community identity. Awareness of this fact is strikingly absent in the literature I reviewed on community-based art education (see chapter "Literature Review"). There is the assumption that art educators should somehow open up to and link with communities, but little conscience of the fact that this requires a creation and re-creation of community spaces and practices through dialogue. And this means that the art educator might also have to redefine his or her professional and even private identity in order to create a common ground that belongs both to him/her and to the community that welcomed his/her contribution. It is in this way that the dichotomies between inside/outside, society/specialist, community/institution, and organic/functional space can be opened up to a fruitful and renewing conversation.

In the case of Spiral Garden, the practise of specific spatial-related group behaviour allows the group identity to evolve. Simple actions such as gathering together in a circle to start and conclude the day, have the power of conferring to the educational practice a precious collaborative and democratic (anti hierarchical) character. In addition, it is the *how* or qualitative value of these practises that provide the transformative power for the *what*. Taking the circle as a symbol of community and democratic approach, its practise must be flexible and inclusive towards all the new members who are invited to participate and contribute to the group with their individual professional background. Within this inclusive approach, the differences are accepted as positive attributes of an interdependent model of behaviour. From this cohesive, inclusive, flexible and interdependent centre, the community spirit may embrace every single member.

The spatial emphasis that exists in the community-building practises of Spiral Garden's staff also belies the general institutional and academic assumption of the neutrality of space as a necessary consequence of its multiple functionality. Institutional settings and organisms that desire to create more "community-based" programs often expect the "community" to be already constituted in the abstract, a kind of portable social identity that can be deposited in any functional space. In fact, what the Spiral Garden program reveals is that the formation of a community is highly dependent on the vital links that are established with the space and environment in which the community performs its practises and rituals. Space is not a neutral, disposable, indiscriminately exchangeable component of community -- it is constitutive. Space is both transformable (passive and receptive) and transforming (active). The space in which a community meets, constitutes, and recognizes itself is vitally social and animist. As Spiral Garden reveals, a successful

community-based art program requires that the space of the community be truly inhabited and embodied by its members and practices.

Second, the performing arts are a powerful vehicle to integrate art and life. Within the context of a community, I have certainly experienced the use of rituals and performing activities as an excellent way to confer organic functionality to art and the teaching/ learning practises. Through *action art*, all the different art languages may be integrated in a meaningful life experience for the community if the *how* remains an essential aspect of the action, and if the *what* of the action has the potential of including to all the members of such a community.

Third, the discipline of art education only exists in the context of specific socio-cultural contexts and communities. From this perspective, art education is not an abstract reality made of different conceptions and theories. Art education means to me a dialogue between theory and practice which is organically interconnected to a bio-socio-cultural system. Within this understanding, I consider it paramount for the art teacher to integrate reflective practises with undogmatic, contextualized theories.

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